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PRIVATE EYE

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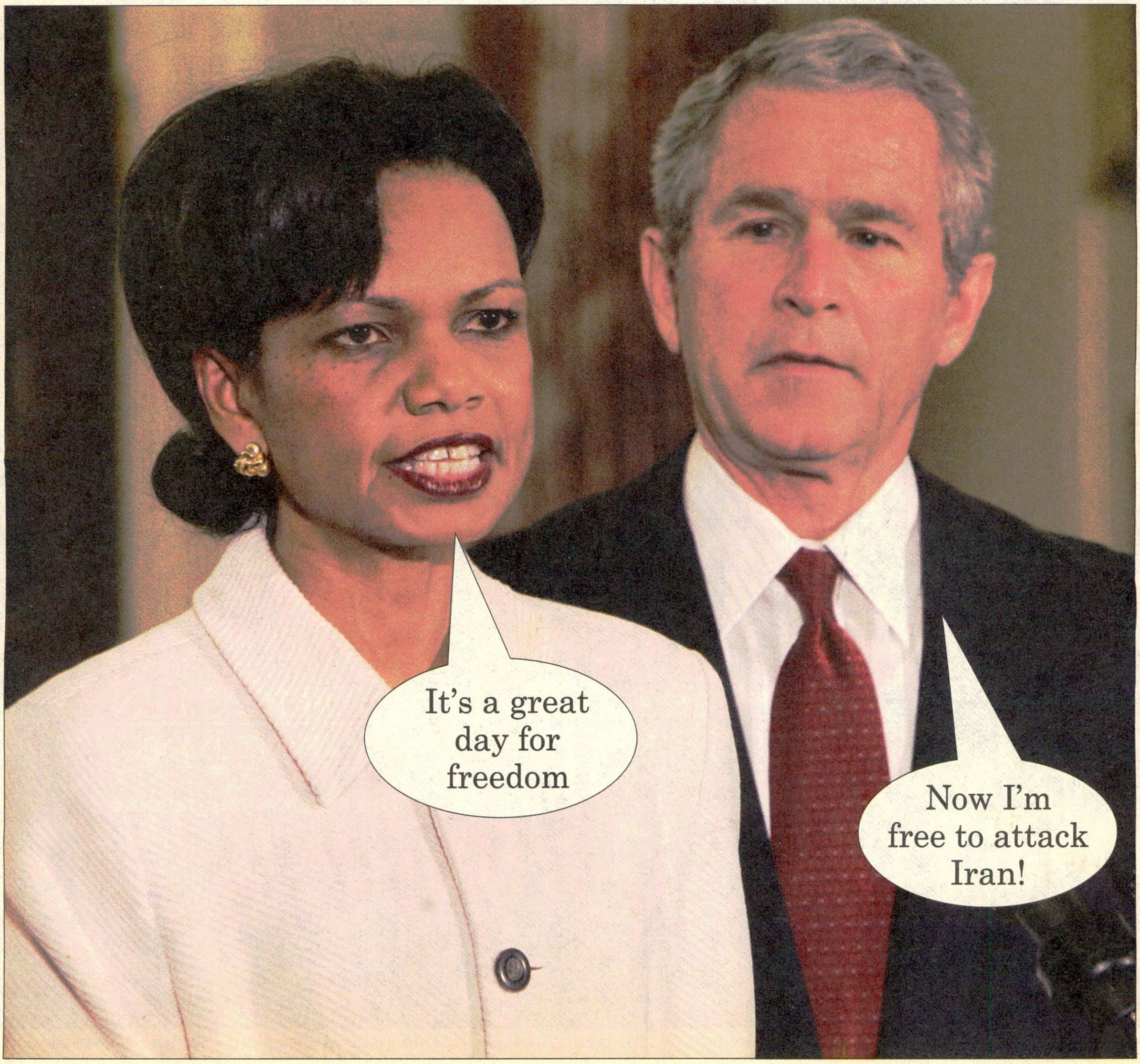
SOUVENIR ISSUE



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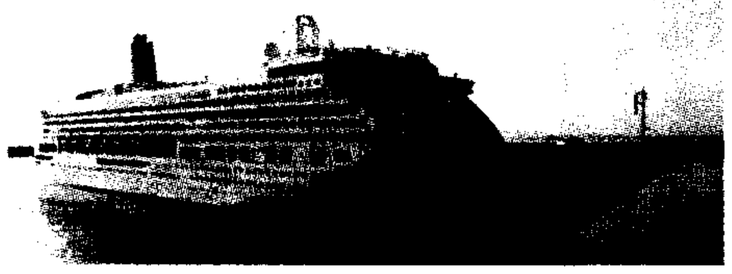
From The Chairman
P & Gnome



DESPITE adverse comments from the press, let me assure you that the maiden voyage of our flagship, the SS Gnomora, was an unqualified success.

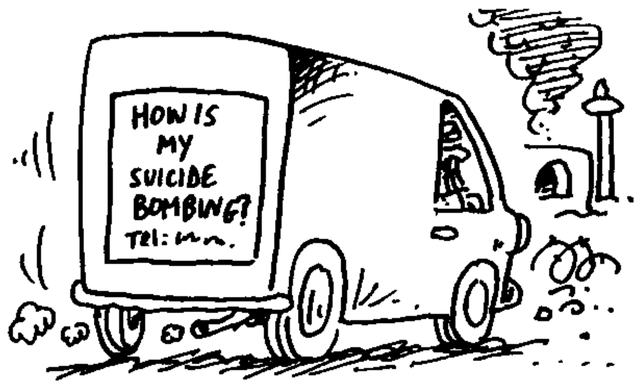
I cannot deny that there were a *few* teething troubles which prevented the Gnomora from leaving port, but this made no difference to the quality of the world cruise on offer. One contented passenger wrote to me personally, saying,

"My wife and I had saved up for a voyage of a lifetime to celebrate our 40th Wedding Anniversary. And we were not disappointed. The view of the dock was sensational and we did not feel seasick once. The cabaret was first rate, with a very funny comedian dressed up as a captain, who kept saying that we would be sailing tomorrow. How we laughed. We were made to feel at home at all times. Which, indeed, we were.

Yours sincerely,
Mr and Mrs Madeupname.

I hope that will be an end to all those who claim that the Gnomora is a jinxed ship which will sink if ever she puts to sea.

E. Strobes, pp. Lord Gnome,
P & Gnome, Dry Dock No. 94,
Southampton



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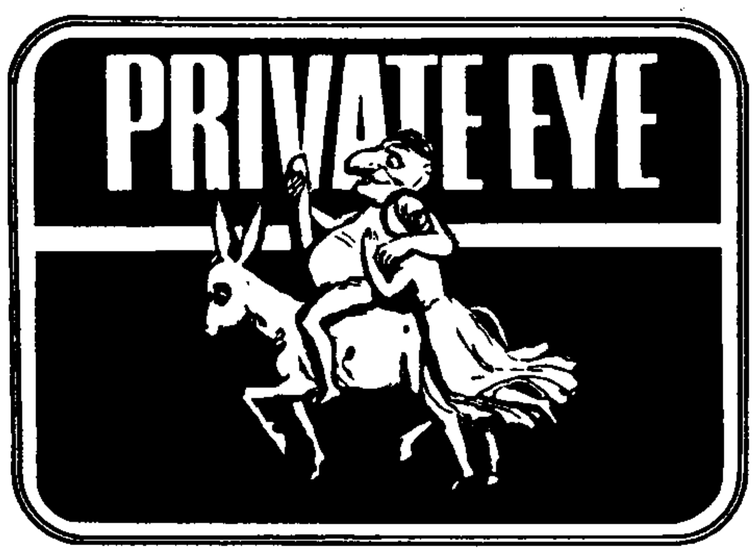

Poll position

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LABOUR party insiders profess surprise at sudden flurry of "late retirements" by backbench MPs: first Tony Banks, then Jack Cunningham and now Sheffield MP Helen Jackson.

Normally the MPs should have told chief whip Hilary Armstrong of their intentions last year; but these "late retirements" allow Labour chiefs themselves to draw up a shortlist of candidates for the vacant seats, thus by-passing the local parties.

Those same Labour chiefs have a list of favoured sons (and daughters) they intend to parachute in. And top of the list is the widely despised Downing Street education supremo Andrew Adonis, and former Mandelson adviser Patrick Diamond.

CHRIS SMITH'S confession of his HIV status to the *Sunday Times* was not entirely the saintly Nelson Mandela-inspired act that he claimed.

Smith told the paper he had outed himself – 21 years after publicly admitting that he was gay – because "I was struck, a couple of weeks ago, by Nelson Mandela's remarks about his son, when he spoke about how nobody should be ashamed of HIV and said that it should be regarded just like any other illness. He was brave and right…" How true.

Smith's decision may also have been influenced by the fact that the *Mail on Sunday* had contacted him and told him it was preparing a story about his secret. The MP's reaction was at first outraged – he threatened to take the *MoS* to the press complaints commission for exposing a private health matter. Even after the *Mail* backed off and did not run anything on 23 January, Smith realised the matter would not stay private for long. And so he prepared his moving statement for the *Sunday Times*…

THE links between Citigate Public Affairs, the lobbying firm representing the big US casinos, and "new" Labour go further than employing Labour peer Lord Faulkner of Worcester – as "revealed" by the *Sunday Times* (two years after it appeared in *Eye* 1049 back in 2002).

Citigate, which also used to represent Enron in Europe, has donated thousands of pounds to the Labour party. The firm's 2003-2004 accounts show that it paid £4,500 to Labour for seats at the annual conference dinner. It also coughed up more than £10,000 to sponsor the Fabian Society's annual lecture, given by Tony Blair.

Number crunchings

60% ■ Percentage of Iraqis who voted in country's first ever free elections despite threats of violence

51% ■ Percentage of Britons who say they are "certain to vote" in this year's general election

QUESTIONED by the *Daily Mirror* about her membership of the "shadowy Catholic society" Opus Dei, education secretary Ruth Kelly was emphatic. "I have a *private* spiritual life and I don't think it is relevant to my job," she told political editor Oonagh Blackman. "I don't see why it should be an issue at all… It is not relevant to my job."

So convinced was the paper by her denials that it printed the interview beneath the headline "My faith is private… it isn't relevant to my job", accompanying the piece with a helpful point-by-point guide to the "Secrets and Fears" that surround the organisation. Point number two being: "Members promise to spread the word of God through their professional work."

"I KNEW I had been accepted by Labour MPs when I saw Dennis Skinner give me the thumbs-up during my first PLP meeting," former Wantage Tory MP Robert Jackson gushed to hacks.

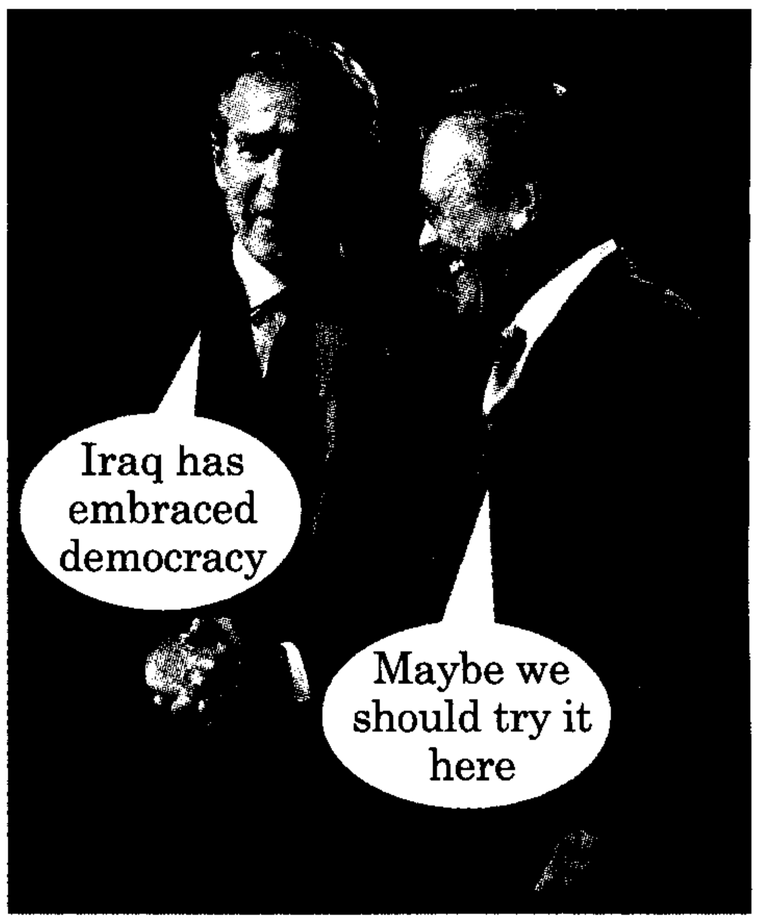
Jackson should get a new pair of specs, for the veteran leftie Skinner was in fact not welcoming him to the party but furiously explaining to colleague Ken Purchase MP what should be required from "Tory turncoats" like Jackson before they are allowed into the inner sanctum.

According to the Beast of Bolsover, Jackson should have been made to sing the Internationale, with his right hand in the traditional clenched fist salute, in front of the parliamentary Labour party. Skinner's "thumbs-up" was in fact a clenched fist – no way to welcome a turncoat of any description.

CRIME hacks who attended last Wednesday's lavish farewell party for Met police commissioner Sir John Stevens at Scotland Yard were surprised to find that their fellow-guests included a convicted criminal.

Property tycoon Gerald Ronson (for it was he) served six months in prison for his part in the famous Guinness scandal, an illegal share-ramping operation. To the hacks' astonishment, the former police chief greeted the former jailbird fondly as an old friend.

Still, at least Jeffrey Archer didn't turn up.



Street Of Shame

IRAQI electors "voted in their millions with immense courage... Entire families, crippled old men supported by their sons, children beside them, babies in the arms of their mothers, sisters and aunts and cousins". Shock, horror! An upbeat *Independent* front-page about Iraq, written by Robert Fisk!

For weeks Fisk had been warning *Indie* readers that the "fantasy election" would be "a mighty mess" – "as unrepresentative of the Iraqi nation as the polls which used to give The Beast 98.86 per cent of the vote". As he quipped on 15 January: "We are all looking forward to the elections in Baghdad with the same kind of enthusiasm that the people of Dresden showed when the first Lancasters flew down the Elbe."

Yet on Monday this week he described the queues of voters as a sight "that took the breath away".

This being Fisk, of course, the elation couldn't last long. After interviewing a young Iraqi soldier ("I am ready to die for this day. We have got to vote"), Fisk warned that "it was easy to be maudlin about such words, to imbibe the false optimism of the Western television networks and the nonsense about Iraq's 'historic' day..." Even for *Indie* sub-editors, apparently – who a mere two pages later used the headline "Kurds put past behind them on an historic day".

Fisk also reported on Monday that despite the high turnout of Shias and Kurds, the Sunnis "boycotted or were intimidated from the polling stations... the Sunni voice of Iraq remained silent". Alas! Once again his own colleagues (like the electors) failed to get the message. As another *Indie* man in Iraq, Patrick Cockburn, reported the same day: "Voters clap and cheer as Sunni turnout is higher than expected."

WHOSE PLANE IS IT ANYWAY?

TODAY is a red-letter day for UK manufacturing... British engines get the A380 into the air, British wings keep it there and British landing gear brings it back to earth.

– The *Times*, 18 January

'Good old Europe has made this possible,' German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder told a packed hall in Airbus's headquarters in Toulouse, southwest France... In a speech to the assembled guests, Chirac called the aircraft 'a great success for Europe'.

– Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 18 January

Half the aircraft parts, by value, are built by American companies. About half the engines will be made by General Electric/Pratt & Whitney Engine Alliance. B.F. Goodrich is building the landing gear. Honeywell is making cockpit electronics.

– *USA Today*, 19 January

JUST FANCY THAT!

"If the *Guardian* is to appeal to a wider spectrum of readers and to become the paper of the establishment, it will have to tone down or get rid of some of its Dave Sparts while importing a few old farts in the process." – Stephen Glover, *Spectator*, 22 January.

"Sir Simon Jenkins, former editor of *The Times* and the *Evening Standard*, is standing down as a columnist on the Thunderer and joining the *Guardian*." – *Evening Standard*, 27 January.

THE *Sun* paid just £7,500 for its Prince Harry photograph – handed over, in best cloak-and-dagger fashion, in a branch of Burger King. But by the eve of publication it was already receiving six-figure offers from papers such as the *Daily Mail* for syndication rights.

Desperate to contain the damage, the Clarence House press officer Paddy Harverson hastily proposed a deal to the *Sun*'s Fergus Shanahan, who was editing in the absence of Rebekah Wade: if you promise not to sell on the picture to other papers, we'll give you an exclusive quote from Harry.

Shanahan agreed and was duly sent a brief statement from the prince. ("I am very sorry if I caused any offence or embarrassment to anyone. It was a poor choice of costume and I apologise.") But when the other first editions arrived Shanahan discovered that Harverson had reneged on the deal by providing the selfsame quote to every national newspaper.

Harverson seems rather proud of getting one over the *Sun*. But he should be warned: Wade and Shanahan do not like being double-crossed (still less cheated out of huge syndication fees) and are plotting a terrible revenge.

IN 1998 the *Mail on Sunday* paid Gordon Park £50,000 to share with readers his harrowing ordeal as the chief suspect in the "Lady in the Lake" case, and his relief at being acquitted.

"'The police were obsessed that I murdered my wife... the interrogation was very aggressive... it worried me that the jury might be persuaded of my guilt': Gordon Park tells of the nightmare of being charged with killing his wife Carol, whose body was found after 21 years at the bottom of Coniston Water."

Last week, after a second murder trial, Gordon Park was convicted of murdering his wife, Carol. In contrast to the other tabloids, however, the *Mail on Sunday* printed not one word about it.

"THE most trusted newspaper in the country is the *Times*, with credibility almost three times that of its nearest competitor." So says a "survey of 150 opinion formers", prominently reported last Tuesday in, er, the *Times*.

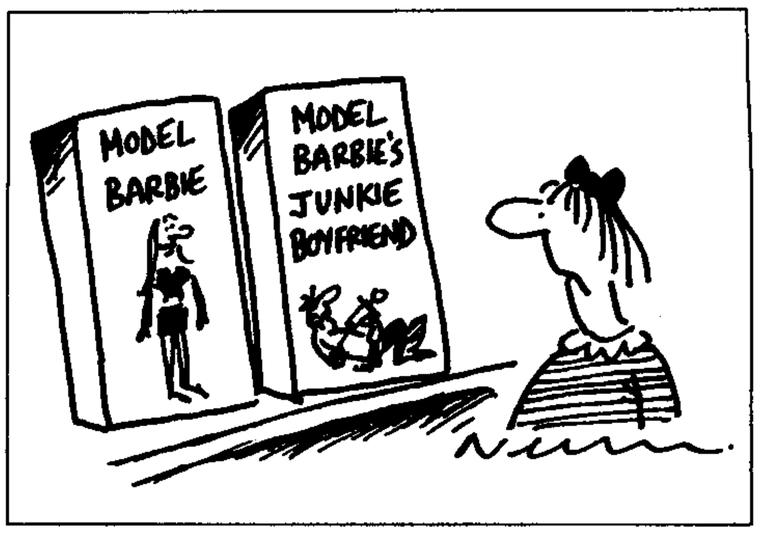
Clearly this can't be the same newspaper whose editor, Robert Thomson, told *Press Gazette* only a week earlier why he would disregard the results of a similar but larger poll in which the *Times* was trounced. "I'm not sure that a quickie poll is the most accurate measure of public sentiment," he explained, "and would prefer to rely on our increasing circulation as an indicator."

If circulation is indeed the best measure of integrity, of course, then the *Sun* and *News of the Screws* must be the most credible titles in the country.

COUNTLESS column inches were given over last week to the story of the part-time tutor at Cardiff University who had "calculated" that Monday 24 January would be the Most Depressing Day of the Year.

While it was a diverting space-filler on a slow news day, the timing and source of this bombshell received much less prominence. Step forward Sky TV publicity department, which in a bid to drum up ratings for the Sky Travel channel, originally commissioned Cliff Arnalls to dream up the spurious misery equation, which it then disseminated to the media.

Sky's thinking was that with this time of year being so dank and depressing, people might feel inclined to get away from it all – and tune in to Sky Travel. This made it highly unlikely that Arnalls would have proclaimed, say, 12 October to be the cruellest day, as Sky Travel wanted the publicity push now. Conveniently Arnalls' calculations came up with January. Luckily, the nation's media were only too happy to oblige.



THERE'S MORE FUN IN THE SUN

***SUN* editor Rebekah Wade introduced the "News in Briefs" feature to page 3 in an attempt to prove that her models' prefrontal lobes were just as impressive as their frontal ones, and the opinions expressed last week by "Jak, 19, from Tunbridge Wells" certainly showed intellectual rigour far beyond her years.**

"There's nothing racist about protecting Britain's borders," she informed readers. "We're a small island nation and we're already overcrowded. Michael Howard's view on immigration is shared throughout the country. It simply makes sense."

In previous topless appearances Jak has aired views on David Blunkett's security proposals and over-zealous multi-culturalism. Oh, and the redeployment of the Black Watch in Iraq.

All her comments have closely mirrored the paper's own editorial line and Jak has obviously been well coached by her proud stepfather – the *Sun*'s executive editor and third in command, Geoff Webster.

THE *Sun* declared its front-page exclusive about a plot to kidnap and torture comedian Julian Clary the "weirdest story you'll read all year", and it was right – not least because it was nearly a decade old. Fifteen paragraphs into the story hack Oliver Harvey revealed that the attack was to have occurred in "mid 1995".

The other peculiarity of the story was the paper's reticence about why Clary was targeted. Although Harvey pointed out that the gang also hoped to kidnap singer Jimmy Somerville and sent a "good looking and charismatic" man to "befriend" both men in "trendy bars and clubs in London's West End" – the new caring, sharing *Sun* at no point made any reference to Clary's homosexuality.

How things have changed. At the time of the alleged kidnap attempt, the *Sun*'s then showbusiness editor Garry Bushell was leading a campaign against the BBC's plans to install Clary as presenter of the *Generation Game* because his sexuality made him unsuitable for a "family show".

THE *Sun*'s Richard Littlejohn took a peculiar sideswipe in his column of 18 January, when he castigated the *Observer* for its coverage of ITV's *Vote For Me*. "We are," he observed loftily, "talking about a paper which employs a disgraced copper's nark as a moralising media commentator to sit in judgement on the rest of us. Why let the facts get in the way of a good smear?"

Peter Preston did indeed infamously reveal the identity of one of his sources, civil servant Sarah Tisdall, to police back in 1983, as a result of which she was imprisoned. But why should Littlejohn choose to drag up the incident now?

Could it have anything to do with comments Preston made in a recent *Observer* column penned in the wake of the "outing" of his friend and colleague Simon Hoggart – that there are "titans of the trade with something to hide, a guilty secret tucked behind the crossword. Could the likes of the *Sun*'s Richard Littlejohn come one day to regret their sniggers? You bet."

Tsunamiballs

■ THE English Golf Union is organising an "Asian Tsunami Golf Day", and the St Mellion International golf and country club in Cornwall has urged all its members to participate. "Because of the nature of the appeal," it notes, "where so many have died and so many others have lost so much, in the spirit of deprivation which they are suffering, those taking part in the competition will be limited to four clubs and a putter."

■ THE Department of trade and industry is hosting the ASEM 2005 eCommerce conference in London on 21-22 February. Since it is "meeting in the shadow the tsunami", according to the press release, there will be special sessions on "tackling spam, paperless trading and eLogistics".

■ UNDER the alarming headline "Quake Threat To Chichester", a front-page splash in the *Chichester Observer* warns that the town "faces the risk of damage to property on land and boats in the harbour as a result of crashing waves created by offshore tremors."

Having been scared out of their wits, however, readers are then reassured that "there is little prospect of an Asian-style tsunami".

■ "MTN Networks Pvt., which runs Sri Lanka's largest cell-phone company, said the 26 December tsunami that killed more than 30,000 people in the nation is unlikely to reduce the growth of mobile-phone subscriptions this year." — **Bloomberg report.**

■ RICHARD WILSON, head of customer services at Sevenoaks council, is annoyed by complaints about a 15-day gap in rubbish collection over the New Year, the *Dartford Messenger* reports. "In light of the events in the Far East over Christmas, when 150,000 people lost their lives in the worst natural disaster in our lifetime," he wrote to South Darenth and Horton Kirby parish council, "on our return to work almost 800 residents rang in to complain that their refuse hadn't been collected. Perspective required, I think." Gill Tripp, a parish councillor, said that although she is very sympathetic to the tsunami victims "we can't see how something that occurred in the Far East is relevant to the problems that occurred with the collections".

■ KENT Brownridge, general manager of *US Weekly* publisher Wenner Media, summarises the importance of Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston's split: "For a celebrity weekly, this is our tsunami."

■ "APART from the killer waves, the Indian Ocean earthquake also triggered a tsunami of news. The volume of coverage has been in the same league as that following the death of Princess Diana and it has been hard not to be swept along..." — **Simon Marquis, Chairman of Zenith Optimedia, *Campaign* magazine.**

■ THE February issue of GQ hits the news-stands with a travel supplement devoted to the resort of Phuket in Thailand. "A sanctuary... staggeringly lush, quiet and safe... Rooms with a view to die for."

All written and printed before the tsunami, of course. Some staff at the mag argued for shredding the supplement and issuing an amended version. But, since this would cost money, Condé Nast management decided not to bother.

■ 'AXE deodorant body spray – Tsunami'. Descriptions – a huge ocean wave caused by an underwater earthquake or volcanic eruption; number one male grooming brand globally; Fresh, Citrus, Marine, Woody; extreme and bold, yet cool and sexy. **From the Unilever website.**

THE DIGGER, THE CORRESPONDENT, THE SPY AND HIS GHOST

IT IS exactly 10 years since the *Sunday Times* led its front page with the "revelation" that Michael Foot was a KGB agent. Even editor John Witherow admitted at the time that the story "may be utter rubbish", as indeed it was. But he published it anyway, presumably in the belief that Foot was too old and frail to sue – a mistaken assumption, as the paper learned to its cost.

Witherow thought he was on safer ground last month when he ran a story naming veteran Australian journalist Claudia Wright, a former Washington correspondent for the *New Statesman*, as a KGB informer who betrayed the MI6 double-agent Oleg Gordievsky to his Russian masters in 1985, forcing him to flee for his life. After all, as the *Sunday Times* article on 2 January reported, Claudia Wright "died of Alzheimer's disease 10 years ago". A piece in the *Times* on 3 January, which repeated the KGB allegations, said that "she died in 1991".

Whoops! A few days later the News International legal department circulated this urgent message: "It has been drawn to our attention that Claudia Wright is not dead and care should be taken when writing about her in future." Both papers ran a brief correction noting that, although gravely ill with Alzheimer's, Wright was indeed still alive in Australia. They declined to retract the claim that she worked for the KGB, safe in the knowledge that she was in no fit state to sue.

And so it proved. Although her husband John Helmer prepared libel writs on her behalf against both the *Times* and *Sunday Times*, Claudia Wright died last Friday before they could be served.

Even so, the newspapers must have had *some* evidence to justify this grave accusation, mustn't they? Both referred to a new book by Victor Cherkashin, the deputy KGB chief in Washington in the mid-1980s, who recruited CIA officers Aldrich Ames and Robert Hanssen as Soviet agents. Until now the assumption has been that it was Ames who betrayed Gordievsky. But although Cherkashin admits in *Spy Handler* that "Ames fingered him", he adds: "A Washington-based British journalist who occasionally provided us with information had tipped me off that Gordievsky was spying for the British SIS [MI6]." Cherkashin also refers to the journalist as "he".

Claudia Wright was neither British nor a man. She was one of Australia's most famous and pugnacious journalists in the 1970s, before moving to Washington with her husband and writing for the *New Statesman*. Yet according to the *Sunday Times*, "speculation has focused on Claudia Wright". The *Times* article used a similar formulation: "The imminent publication of the book has generated speculation that the correspondent he had in mind was Claudia Wright".

Where does all this speculation come from? The *Times* notes that in 1994 a former junior officer in the KGB's Washington residence, Yuri Shvets, "claimed in a book to have recruited a journalist codenamed Sputnitsa in the 1980s, whom Mr Cherkashin identified as Claudia Wright".

Whoops again! Cherkashin did nothing of the sort. "I never met anyone under this name in Washington," he told the *Eye* from Moscow last week. "I didn't even know Claudia Wright existed." The *Times* also omitted to mention that Claudia Wright and her husband both sued for libel and won an apology from newspapers which printed Shvets's story. He turned out to be a wildly unreliable source who (in the words of his old boss Cherkashin) was "almost always drunk". The FBI spent two years investigating his claims but concluded they were worthless.

Oleg Gordievsky, the supposed victim of Wright's betrayal, is equally scornful. As he points out: "How would a journalist ever have known that I was working secretly for MI6? It sounds to me like an attempt by the surviving members of the KGB of the 1980s to spread disinformation."

So why would two British newspapers revive this discredited 11-year-old allegation? In a letter to Wright's solicitors last week, News International's lawyer insisted that "the two articles that appeared in the *Sunday Times* on 2 January and in the *Times* on 3 January were generated entirely independently from each other". It is nevertheless a striking coincidence that the only papers which went for the story are both in Murdoch's Augean stable. By another coincidence, there is a long history of animosity towards Claudia Wright by the Dirty Digger, who loathed the feminism and radical politics which earned her the nickname "Claws" when she worked for the Murdoch-owned *Melbourne Herald* in the 1970s.

He tried to silence her by offering her a job as the paper's "personal correspondent at Buckingham Palace". When that failed she was fired, ostensibly for appearing in an advertisement for a bed-linen company – which violated the Digger's strict rules against "conflicts of interest" (*sic*).

A final bizarre aspect to this strange affair is that the *Times* news-story of 3 January was written "by Gregory Feifer and Michael Evans". Evans is a *Times* reporter but Feifer is the American ghost-writer of Cherkashin's new book, who worked as a journalist in Moscow in the 1990s. By yet another coincidence, Claudia Wright's husband John Helmer has been a Moscow correspondent for the past 16 years and remembers Feifer well. "He tried to get a job from me," he told the *Eye*. "He was a freelance looking for work on English-language papers I was involved in."

It would be absurd to think that Feifer bears a grudge because Helmer was unable to fix him a job. No doubt he is simply trying to promote *Spy Handler* by finding a British angle. But Victor Cherkhashin doesn't seem hugely grateful. "I don't bear any responsibility for what he wrote in the article," Cherkashin says of his ghost-writer. "It is nonsense."

Number crunchings

500

■ US journalists embedded with army during war in Iraq

1000

■ US journalists covering trial of Michael Jackson

*"**Now** who's the fairest of them all?"*

WHEN chancellor Gordon Brown announced 80,000 civil service job cuts last year after former Marconi chairman Sir Peter Gershon had done his efficiency review, most business leaders applauded the reduction in bureaucracy and government waste.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI), however, was shrewder and, while welcoming the review, questioned the proposed 1,500 job losses in one part of Whitehall – at the department of trade and industry.

While it was fine to lay off people who were doing unimportant things like running the tax and benefits systems, CBI director-general Digby Jones (that's *Sir* Digby since the new year) insisted that "the DTI must have the resources it needs to do the job," because "firms need an effective champion at the heart of government".

Business is certainly "at the heart of government" to judge by trade and industry secretary Patricia Hewitt's answer to Labour MP Alan Simpson. He wanted to know how many people are in the DTI on secondment from the private sector; and the answer is 66.

Among those championing the cause of business are: six people from BAE Systems, whose lobbying on ethical conditions for export credits persuaded Hewitt to relax the rules before campaigners forced a judicial review of her decision; seven representatives of big accountancy firms, who recently persuaded the DTI to allow them to limit their liabilities for dodgy audits; an employee of Kellogg Brown Root, the Halliburton subsidiary that recently secured an export credit from the government despite the group's dubious business practices; and someone from the Drinks Marketing Consortium Ltd, a body that will no doubt be very pleased indeed with the government decision to introduce 24-hour drinking.

Old favourites such as Shell and BP also have people at the DTI, as does Tate & Lyle, with one of its staff handily placed to contribute to the department's approach to EU sugar subsidies.

JUST where are those Tory tax cuts going to come from? Michael Howard claims that abolishing 168 public bodies will get him well on the way to £4bn tax cuts.

However, some of the bodies on his list bear closer inspection. The Conservatives plan to close down the hill farming advisory committee, the committee of investigation for Great Britain and the consumers' committee for Great Britain under the agriculture marketing act 1958.

Since none of the three committees has any members, they never meet and each has been listed by the department of environment, food and rural affairs as "defunct" for quite some time, that's a total saving of, er, nothing – and some way short of £4bn.

HATS off to Labour MP Ann Cryer for her consistency on identity cards.

On 28 November she signed an early-day motion submitted by Austin Mitchell MP calling on the government to "reconsider its proposal for national identity cards" and regretting "the Government's efforts to stampede support by using fears of terrorism and asylum seekers".

Astonishingly, however, by the very next day, 29 November, Ann had changed her mind. She solemnly told the Commons that once illegal immigrants had arrived "ID cards will control what they are able to do and enable them to be arrested and deported". Of course they will, Ann.

AS one of "new" Labour's favourite media moguls, Lord Hollick is a great catch for American private equity group KKR, whose board he has joined.

KKR is said to be interested in ITV; but as a foreign buyer any deal would have to pass a public interest test judged by culture secretary Tessa Jowell. Given KKR's dodgy track record, this might prove tricky.

KKR's notorious acquisition of American fags and biscuit giant RJR Nabisco using billions in "junk bonds" issued through infamous bankers like Ivan Boesky and Michael Milken, was recounted in the defining account of 1980s corporate raiding, *Barbarians at the Gate*.

As recently as 2002 the European Commission filed a lawsuit in New York alleging years of money-laundering by RJR Nabisco, through the sale of smuggled cigarettes, while controlled by KKR. Only a cynic would suggest that Hollick (dinner guest of Tony; gifted the South Bank chairmanship by Tessa) was recruited for his hotline to the heart of "new" Labour should some serious schmoozing be necessary.

THE abrupt decision by UK Coal to shut Ellington colliery, the last deep mine in the north-east, with the loss of more than 300 jobs is embarrassing for the region's MPs, who include Tony Blair, Alan Milburn and Stephen Byers.

While he was a minister at the trade and industry department, the latter negotiated an expensive funding package to keep the mine going and workers had been assured of several more years of work as Ellington had a steady contract to provide coal to the nearby Alcan aluminium works.

UK Coal blamed "serious flooding for the closure", while local workers claimed that they had managed to halt it.

PS: Labour once promised "energy diversification" and "investment in clean coal technology" to prevent a reliance on either finite North Sea gas or gas from unstable areas such as Algeria and Russia. Sadly, Ellington has joined the growing list of pit closures, including Longannet, Hatfield Main and the whole of the massive Selby coalfield, since Tony Blair was elected in 1997. The handful of remaining miners in the industry are thinking of minting a new badge. Instead of saying "Coal not Dole" it will read "Coal not Tony".

Little Asbo-peep and her unruly sheep

GALLOPING alongside the *Daily Mail* at the head of the crusade against longer opening hours for pubs is Captain Birdseye lookalike Frank Dobson MP, the former health secretary.

He claims that his constituents' lives are ruined by the behaviour of drunken louts, which is why for many years "I have pressed for tougher laws on drinking".

What has caused all the fuss is the imminent issuing of 24-hour licences under the licensing act 2003. So which irresponsible MPs allowed this appalling legislation to go through? A glance at Hansard reveals that one man who voted for the bill at both its second and third reading was, er, Captain Birdseye.

THE new freedom of information act has been giving senior civil servants a headache: not because they have been swamped with tricky requests for sensitive material but because they have been swamped with tricky requests to, er, monitor the requests.

The latest order to Whitehall bosses is to provide a twice weekly breakdown of the requests being made by journalists, MPs, commercial bosses and the public. This has provoked protests from civil servants, one of whom complained: "Monitoring the FOI is becoming an inhibitor to responding to them [*requests for information*].'

The monitoring is being demanded by government departments, Downing Street, ministers' private offices and the department of constitutional affairs. When instructed that all FOI requests must be met within 20 days, one senior home office worker complained: "Not only do we get a new monitoring request (or more) everyday, but they are each required by differing parts of the office which just adds to the impression that work is being duplicated. The irony is that this request for information on compliance, when combined with the multitude of other monitoring requests, is a threat to us meeting it."

PLAID CYMRU leader Ieuan Wyn Jones vanished without trace after Christmas when he failed to let his 11 Welsh Assembly members know he was flying to Pakistan to investigate the problems of divided Kashmir.

Jones returned from his tour to tell his grumbling party his silence had been prompted by fears that pre-publicity would have jeopardised the trip. Just how, he failed to elaborate.

Jones's findings obviously make the trip well worthwhile. "Serious steps need to be taken to resolve the conflict between India and Pakistan… The issue should be regarded as a serious threat to world peace," he shockingly told the *Western Mail*.

"Wales should take up the cases of small nations," he added. Step aside United Nations. Wales will handle it.

POLICE 5

FAILING as chief constable of Sussex and being forced to resign by the home secretary has not stopped Paul Whitehouse landing a top government job.

Whitehouse, pushed out by David Blunkett after he promoted two officers who had been involved in a botched police raid which saw an innocent, unarmed man shot dead in his bed, is now chair of the new "gangmaster licensing authority".

Supported by enforcement officers from the department of environment, fisheries and rural affairs, Whitehouse will head a team of 45 to track down illegal gangmasters who employ casual workers in the agricultural and shell-fish trade.

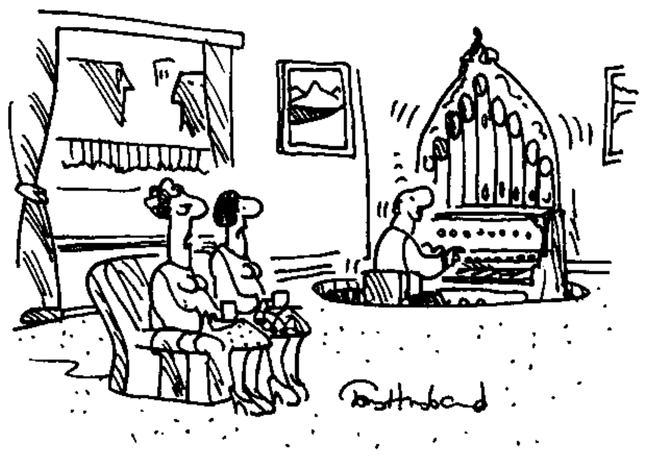
CRAPITA has long made tidy sums from the talking shops run by its Capita Conferences UK division.

This outfit enables public sector delegates to snooze through talks and seminars on "The Ethical Framework of Local Government" or "Addressing Knives and Violence", while the dear old taxpayer coughs up around £400 per person, plus travel expenses.

Fliers for this month's "Women in the Modern Police Service" conference promises that Suzette Davenport, vice-president of the British Association of Women in Policing (BAWP), will give the 10.40am address on "The Gender Agenda". But she won't do anything of the sort.

BAWP has sent a memo to its members pointing out that Davenport never agreed to speak and accusing the conference organisers of using "somewhat devious" tactics to try to nab big name speakers from BAWP and the Association of Chief Police Officers.

"Both organisations are unsure of the purpose of the conference," notes the memo, "other than to make Capita a lot of money."



"...and this is what he spent his lottery winnings on"

PFI NEWS

AS JARVIS struggles to survive and honour the private finance initiative (PFI) deals it hasn't managed to sell, with its subcontractors having to go to court to get even part of what the firm owes them, the government continues to trot out the discredited claim that, in the event of failures like this (14 projects at a standstill), the bankers will happily step in.

Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn asked what the department of health was doing about one of Jarvis's stalled PFIs near him: the contract to build acute facilities at Whittington hospital. He was assured by health minister John Hutton that his department was "monitoring" the situation and that "it is, in the first instance, for the project's funders and other shareholders to remedy the situation. There are strong incentives for them to do this."

Alas, they're not strong enough for HBOS, formerly Halifax Bank of Scotland, the bank funding the Whittington hospital PFI. HBOS's board includes Gren Folwell who, as it happens, is a director of Partnerships UK, the government-backed promoter of the virtues of PFI which routinely spouts the line about bankers coming to the rescue.

Months after work on the project first came to halt, and well after building should have finished, the diggers remain idle waiting for the HBOS bankers to come and switch them on.

FORMER audit commission chief executive Sir Andrew Foster hasn't gone for a pipe and slippers retirement. He's cashing in on his extensive experience as one of the country's top watchdogs and, before that, as second in command at the NHS. And why not?

His latest appointment is to the board of PruHealth, a joint venture between Prudential and South African private health company Discovery Holdings, which offers "revolutionary" health insurance that gets cheaper the healthier you are.

He is also a director of (at least) four other companies: Nestor Healthcare plc, a provider of temporary doctors and nurses to short-staffed hospitals; National Express, responsible for many local transport services; Royal Bank of Canada, an expanding PFI financier; and Liberata, an "outsourcing" contractor to local authorities.

The audit commission is of course responsible for checking the performance of all health and local authorities, including their burgeoning use of private sector companies of the sort now employing its former chief. No doubt Sir Andrew vetted them all before "retiring".

A BELATED settling of scores is taking place at Amicus as general-secretary Derek Simpson tightens his grip and the influence of his predecessor Roger "Currant Bun" Lyons and his cronies wanes.

Caught in the crossfire is ambitious deputy general-secretary Lucy Kelly, who has been suspended throughout a long-delayed investigation into allegations of widespread fraud by union officials.

The investigation relates to events surrounding the former MSF head of finance Nelson Mendes, who in 1997 stole thousands of pounds from that union (now part of Amicus) by claiming expenses for meetings that either didn't happen or which he did not attend. Other officials testified they were also present at some of the non-existent meetings.

In July 2001 the government's watchdog, the trade union certification officer, issued a report which revealed that some MSF officials had lied to cover up the theft.

According to some estimates, in 1997 alone more than £100,000 of union funds were fraudulently claimed in expenses. But Mendes's maximum cut, according to auditors, was £10,453. So investigators, headed by the former general-secretaries of the GPMU and UNIFI unions, Tony Dubbins and Ed Sweeney, are trying to find out not only who else's hands were in the till, but also whether, for whatever reason, any officials took part in a cover-up.

An Amicus spokesman told the *Eye* the union had "absolutely no comment" and refused to confirm or deny that Kelly was suspended.

'Blackleg'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

BACKROOM machinations to save the career of Franz-Herman Brüner, head of the European Union's anti-fraud office, Olaf, whose current five-year contract terminates at the end of February, seem to have backfired.

Brüner's high-handedness in trying to halt investigative reporting by *Stern* magazine correspondent Hans-Martin Tillack (see *Eyes passim*) are partly behind protests by MEPs against him continuing in the same position under a new contract. (It was Brüner who sent in the Belgian police to seize Tillack's files in the hope of identifying the source of his stories.)

But what really stinks is the European Commission's manoeuvring over his possible replacement. First, the job advertising his post was released on 23 December when most candidates had other things on their minds. Worse, it restricted applicants to insiders only – officials in the EU institutions and their associates – and demanded such specific experience it ruled out most candidates. In addition, the closing date was unusually tight: 20 January.

Surprise, surprise, there was only one candidate. Franz-Herman Brüner himself. Did he write the job advertisement too?

The new commissioner for administration and anti-fraud, Siim Kallas, appears to have smelled a rat and been astonished at the Brussels administration's trickiness and lack of transparency. Now the job is being advertised again – this time openly.

THERE'S a bad smell coming from the EU agriculture and fisheries committee – and it has nothing to do with fish.

The EU council is so desperate to push through controversial computer patent legislation, against the wishes of the European parliament, that it twice recently tried sneakily to attach it to the agenda of the agricultural committee!

Happily the move was blocked by the Poles, who argued that computer patents have nothing to do with fish or farming.

Eye readers will recall how Ireland's Bertie Ahearn, whose recent presidency of the EU council was sponsored by none other than Microsoft, tried to push through software patent legislation that would benefit big computer companies (like Microsoft) while putting at risk Europe's smaller software industry.

MEPs had listened to leading European economists and academics and sought to limit what could be patented. But it seems there are those on the EU council who will try anything to slip the directive on to the books.

Down on the Farm

FOR reasons which may become obvious, the hero (or villain) of this everyday story of farming life is keen not to be identified, so let us just call him "Mike".

Faced with a quality inspection under the "beef and lamb assurance" scheme, which means he can sell at a premium price to supermarkets, Mike was recently having a tidy-up on his Cornish farm, since a "tidy farm" is one of the scheme's requirements. Having collected a pile of scrap machinery and zinc sheeting, he loaded them up behind his tractor and set off for the nearest metal recycling centre in Bodmin. A policewoman waved him down and demanded to inspect his fuel tank. When her dipstick came out showing "red" diesel, she got on to Customs and Excise.

For farm use farmers are allowed to buy "red" rather than ordinary white diesel. This gives them a huge benefit because the duty on red is only 5.22p a litre as opposed to 41.88p on the white stuff. This subsidy totals £840m a year.

The use of red diesel is permitted to farmers so long as they don't travel more than a few miles from the farm. This was what drew the attention of the policewoman who stopped "Mike". Even though he was on legitimate farm business, she thought he had overstepped the permissible distance and impounded his tractor.

Although "Mike" was allowed to deliver his load, his tractor was then taken away on a low loader to a nearby pound. He had to call another tractor from home to pick up his trailer. Only after a week was he permitted to pick up his original tractor, after paying a storage fee of £120 plus £300 for the low loader. He was then fined £250 by customs for driving his tractor on red diesel and another £250 for driving it illegally on the highway, a grand total of £920.

This is particularly relevant in light of the EU's new farm waste regulations, which will soon make it illegal for farmers to keep any "waste" on their farms. Either they will have to take it to a licensed waste centre, or they will have to pay huge sums to get a licensed contractor to take it away for them. But if they wish to save money by moving it themselves, the only practical means of doing so will be to use a tractor.

Under EU waste directives, the number of waste disposal sites is being drastically reduced – particularly those licensed to take "hazardous waste" of which there are now only 10 in the entire UK. Many farms are now hundreds of miles from the nearest hazardous waste site (in Scotland and Wales there isn't one). And since the EU's classification of what constitutes "hazardous waste" has also been vastly extended (to include paint tins, batteries, asbestos sheeting and anything which has been in contact with oil), this poses farmers with quite a problem.

'Muckspreader'

JUST FANCY THAT!

NOT everyone at the Southern Society of Chartered Accountants is convinced that the speaker for their annual dinner is of the appropriate character and probity to address their good selves.

However, society president Adrian Simpson told the *Bournemouth News* that booking convicted perjurer Jeffrey Archer for the event in March was a "coup" for the society.

"Coup" is not the best word to use in association with Archer at the moment, since the disgraced peer is busily denying that he is the same "JH Archer" who, records show, gave £70,000 to Simon Mann to help bankroll a failed coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea.

✦ HUNGARIANS BURN effigies on New Year's eve known as "Jack Straw" which represent the evils and misfortunes of the past year. Jack Straw is carried around the village before being burnt.

The Indian Express

FIVE TV

Hallowed Be Thy Game (C4)

Anatomy for Beginners (C4)

IN MOST television companies, programmes are commissioned and/or produced by generic departments or, in the old phrase, "slot barons". By the time the programme reaches the viewer, this process has been covered over by the copyright card of the organisation or production company. Even so, the viewer can usually guess who's behind what: *Match of the Day* must come from the sports boys, *Blue Peter* from the kids' commissioners and so on.

Now, though, something called "cross-genre programming" – a posh phrase for ratings-chasings – means that certain types of show turn up in disguise. **Hallowed Be Thy Game**, for example, will doubtless be touted to Ofcom for inclusion in its column totting up the fourth channel's religious output. But, like the Premiership stars who were its main interviewees, the programme was desperate to be transferred from one side to another and change its shirt.

Mark Dowd, billed as a "Manchester United fan and former Franciscan Friar" set out to explore whether football has become a religion. This documentary felt like a prime example of a television show set in motion before the tsunami. It's hard to believe that a religious programme could be commissioned now that worried away at the question of whether God intervenes in the results of football matches.

Anyway, Dowd laid out his evidence. This primarily involved slowing down footage of football matches and laying over them *Mozart's Requiem*, with Gazza weeping at Italia 90 as the lachrymosa and then a cross-cut from the Brazilian captain lifting the World Cup to John Paul II hoisting a chalice, which is surely more blasphemous than anything in *Jerry Springer: The Opera*.

The tactic, in any case, is bogus. Sacred music has the knack of making things seem sacred, just as rock music makes them appear dangerous and sexy. If you slowed down footage of sex, deep-sea fishing or dealings on the futures market and lashed Fauré over them, you could give any of these activities the look of a religion; speed them up and add Metallica and they look satanic. This is a result of the intervention of a video editor not a deity.

But Dowd had other data. It was laboriously explained that

> **9.00 Drunk and Dangerous Traffic Cops** Following police in Southend-on-Sea, Dover and Folkestone as they deal with drinkers determined to cause trouble during the August Bank Holiday
>
> *The Times*

Robbie Fowler's nickname at Liverpool was "God". This was obviously no more than irreverent wit in a city drenched in religion; but Dowd furrowed his brow and devoted several minutes to worrying that the Kop end had really believed that Robbie was the Messiah, thus breaking the Biblical injunction against raising false Gods.

It was a sign of the programme's theological sloppiness that the camera kept focusing on football scarfs with slogans such as, for example, "Portsmouth Until I Die". But that is just being a football fan. As Dowd and the commissioning editor must have known, they would only have had a case if the scarves said: "Portsmouth After I Die".

This platitudinous padding was a pity because Dowd had somehow secured interviews with football figures who rarely speak: including Sir Alex Ferguson and Michael Owen. The revelation that the Manchester United manager says his prayers every night but believes that it is wrong to pray for the outcome of a match was a genuine scoop, revealing something untouched in hundreds of profiles.

The willingness of Owen and Ferguson to take part in such a film revealed the extent to which footballers are religious (a product of the game's roots in big-city working-class culture). This was a truly interesting topic for a documentary: far more useful than the ludicrous thesis that footballers have become gods, to which Dowd kept returning.

His final clinching evidence that football has become a religion was footage of Greek Orthodox monks leaping into the air when Greece won the European championships. But you could easily find footage of hospital doctors reacting in the same way to the same footage. Would that prove that football had become medicine?

But at least *Hallowed Be Thy Game*, though longing to be a sports programme, did keep mentioning religion. **Anatomy For Beginners**, which is credited as part of the network's education programmes, actually involves that old creep Dr Gunther von Hagens cutting up bodies again. Like all Von Hagens's work, it was a kind of zombie sitcom and should properly have been labelled as entertainment.

In his surgical scrubs and black wide-brimmed hat, Von Hagens carved up cadavers and waved round strips of dried flesh, while Professor John Lee, an English pathologist, delivered a lecture, his clinical English occasionally interrupted by barked Strangelove phrases from Von Hagens. A ghoul-show aimed at those disappointed that the bodies in *Silent Witness* are plastic or actors, *Anatomy For Beginners* was no more an education programme than *What Not To Wear* is a history of industrial cotton production. Perhaps C4's religious arm should get Mark Dowd to investigate whether the network is really a satanic cult.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

STAFF at Channel 5 News, now under the control of BSkyB, got a rude taste of Sky's management style when two weeks after going on air the entire newsroom was given a written warning and threatened with the sack.

Chief executive Mark Calvert was panicked into the attack on his staff after being bollocked by his boss Nick Pollard, head of Sky News, for a spate of production errors. He issued his hacks with a list of things that "would not be tolerated", including "sloppy journalism, wrong spelling and lack of communication". "There will be severe consequences," the pint-sized tyrant bellowed. "You have been warned."

Despite managing to destroy staff morale at a stroke, Calvert knows that macho swagger is now an essential management trait at Sky. Just a few weeks earlier the Brussels bureau chief Colin Brazier head-butted his producer Julian Morrison after the bureau's Christmas dinner. As Morrison fell to the pavement Brazier then kicked him in the head repeatedly, breaking his nose and damaging his teeth.

Brazier was recalled to London while his bosses considered what to do. Since Sky anchor Frank Partridge was summarily dismissed three years ago for slapping co-presenter Kay Burley, colleagues assumed "Bruiser" Brazier would have to go as well.

But times have changed. Brazier has indeed now gone – to a plum posting as Sky's Washington correspondent.

STAFF at Granada, one half of the ITV behemoth which last year announced more than 1,000 job losses around the country, last week gathered at the broadcaster's Leeds studios to attend what boss Bill Jones optimistically described as "a positive and jolly way to kick off 2005... the weirdest piece of corporate bonding in Granada's long and distinguished history!"

"It's EXCLUSIVELY for the production staff of Granada Factual North, be they in Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester or London... As teams go, we're pretty spread out and far too few of us know what the rest of the tribe looks like," pointed out Jones in an email to staff. "The idea is to try and get upwards of 200 of us together to perform in a giant steel band... hopefully captured on videotape for posterity!"

Perhaps the broadcaster could use the footage to replace some of its regional output, which it is currently planning to cut by half, with the loss of further jobs across the region.

THE producers of *Vote For Me* have asked us to point out that their programme was not "shunted back into the middle of the night" as we stated in the last issue of *Private Eye*.

In fact ITV never intended to broadcast it during prime time at all.

Living in the Sun
THE SHOW ABOUT BRITS WHO HAVE FLED ABROAD...
HEATHROW
TO ESCAPE THE FAMILIARITY & MONOTONY OF EVERYDAY UK LIFE ...
ONLY TO ARRIVE AND FIND...
SHE'S BLOODY WELL THERE TOO!
With Nadia Sawalha
Ken Pyne

BBC chairman Michael Grade continues to try to reassure culture secretary Tessa Jowell that his new board of governors will be independent, accountable and endowed with transparent ways of decision-making.

Odd then that the board refused last week to meet union reps who wanted to pass on the concerns of BBC staff who will be most affected by the board's approval of management plans for change.

THE £5m sale of the BBC's glossy women's magazine *eve* to Lord Heseltine's Haymarket Magazines was greeted with trebles all round.

The BBC's Peter Phippen pointed out that "the team we have created is first class" and "it was important to find a publisher who was keen to keep the team together"; while publishing director Jo Morrell rejoiced over the fact that "we have a great team on *eve* and I am delighted we have the chance to all stay together."

Ten days after the sale Haymarket advertised the following jobs: "Senior Designer, eve; Director of Photography, eve; Senior Staff Writer, eve; Designer, eve."

NATIONAL Boat Shows chairman Brian Peters certainly got his money's worth from his company's sponsorship of ITV's 50-minute report on the Schroders London Boat Show, broadcast and then repeated twice in January.

Not only was the show a great plug for boat shows, but it also featured a millionaire owner of a Fairline motor cruiser and his quest for a new and larger boat to replace it. After careful consideration of the options – from Sealine, Sunseeker and Princess – he settled on a £800,000 Fairline Squadron 58, as, in his opinion, it was clearly superior to the others. The chairman of Fairline's biggest distributor, Fairline Port? One Brian Peters...

BBC staff facing a proposed move to Manchester were invited to an "awayday" to discuss the hated plan.

Eighty of them spent an afternoon brainstorming just four issues with predictable results: the network manager coordinating the "bits of our thinking" revealed in an email to Five Live staff that after the event "there are many more questions than answers at this point".

In fact, no one has a clue what's going on. The fatuous email includes "flip charts from the sessions which don't mean much on their own" and concludes that a "broad brush picture of what life might be like" in a city as foreign to Five Live producers as the moon Titan was the only result. Thus a "Working Futures" initiative has now been commissioned to sort out the mess, even though the Beeb has no idea how much – if any – of Five Live will be relocated.

ITV chief executive Charles Allen has been dropping big hints he might not renew ITN's contract to provide ITV with news after 2008 unless ITV can buy all the shares in the company it does not yet own.

As soon as Allen's remarks were reported, share prices and morale dropped.

If Allen gets his paws on ITN, he'll keep the brand name but sack half the hacks who still have jobs and dumb the operation down even further in keeping with ITV's "low intelligence but high return from advertisers" peak schedules.

KILLER FACT

BBC News 24 viewers were treated to an illuminating description on the new A380 Airbus, courtesy of the normally precise Nick Higham.

He said the new aircraft was rather large and used a graphic to make his point. "This is a blue whale. It's half the length of the A380. But it carries no passengers."

AD NAUSEAM

***EYE* 1120 reported that it had been a bad winter for adland's column-inch obsessive Trevor Beattie, and wondered if anyone in "new" Labour was worried that he was now in charge of the party's pre-election advertising.**

It now appears they should have been worried, what with Beattie's latest ruse depicting Michael Howard as a hypnotist/pig. And Alan Milburn, who signed off the campaign, should also have been ready for what has been classic Beattie.

Beattie's technique is to maximise his client's budget by garnering free publicity in the form of a deliberately managed controversy. *Eye* 1117 told how Labour had announced that it would be spending much less on posters this time round: could it be that the weekend headlines were all part of the plan?

WHAT a palaver. Two internet tyros called Lee and Dan produce an online "viral" ad for the VW Polo, borrowing the "Small but tough" strap created by DDB for a film about a suicide bomber. In the slot, the bomber tries to blow up a restaurant but the Polo is so sturdy the explosion is contained within the car.

Everyone in adland thinks it's mighty clever and for the director, Stuart Fryer (who admits he made the ad in a bid for work with one of the big agencies), it appears to be mission accomplished. DDB has strenuously denied it was anything to do with it and VW, according to some reports, is to sue for the damage done to its reputation. That is, if it can find the clever blighters, which it can't because it warned them via the papers that it "might" sue last week.

Such elaborate repudiations are a bit rich coming from DDB, VW and indeed both the advertising and motoring industries. In 2003 BMP DDB, as it was then known, produced an ad for a diesel VW Passat in which a little girl repeatedly said "Bollocks", mimicking her father who kept forgetting at the petrol station that his Passat was a diesel. It could not be used on TV but it won awards, and back then both BMP and VW were happy to garner credibility for a viral slot. Perhaps this set Lee and Dan thinking.

The ad industry, whatever it says, loves this stuff. Virals are seen by creatives as a chance to finally escape from the regulators and the suits who stifle their Promethean verve. They have forgotten, of course, that they are salesmen, not artists; but then so has most of the industry. As a result, last month saw the first awards for virals, tacit recognition that every public slap of the wrists comes with a smattering of quiet applause.

Jackson Album Remixes

MOST actors' contract negotiations are done via their agents rather than through the pages of News International titles. But then not all actors are Ross Kemp and married to *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade.

Having devoted half a page of her paper on 8 January to the return of her husband's pisspoor SAS series *Ultimate Force* – Kemp's last obligation to ITV, who recently relieved him of his £1.5m "golden handcuffs" contract – Wade allowed her colleague Andy Coulson, editor of the *News of the World*, to take up the baton last Sunday with a full-page "exclusive" declaring that "Beeb chiefs want hardman Ross Kemp back in *EastEnders* and have ordered the soap's new bosses to GET IT SORTED!"

"Since his departure, ratings have dropped from 16m viewers per episode to 11m," declared hackette Polly Graham, though she sounded a note of caution: "A show insider said 'it is far from certain that Ross will rejoin the show'."

The following day's *Sun* bore better news for the Wade household budget, however: "Beeb signs Ross... Kemp returns in sitcom role." The fact that the role in question is merely a cameo in a single episode of Ricky Gervais' new series *Extras* need not hinder the negotiations over *EastEnders*, however. As TV editor Emily Smith coyly put it: "An insider said: 'It would be TV gold to get Ross back but we are only in talks'."

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1/BBC2

Anne Robinson: What is the only even prime number?

Contestant: Nine.

Robinson: What's the capital of Germany?

Garry Bushell: Hamburg.

Robinson: After Guernsey, Jersey and Alderney, what is the next largest of the Channel Islands?

Jodie Marsh: Er... is England a Channel Island?

Radio 1, Chappers & Dave show

Chappers *(or possibly Dave)*: In which British city is Edinburgh Castle?

Contestant: Glasgow.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

DOING THE ROUNDS

MD has been pointing out the contradiction in "new" Labour's health policy for months. It pretends to offer individual patients more choice, but to increase this choice it has had to promise private providers a guaranteed slice of the cake. So patients are being coerced into going to new independent treatment centres (ITCs) whether they choose to or not.

The problem, as ever with Labour, starts with an unrealistic target hastily forced on the health service without discussion with, or the agreement of, those who have to implement it. Half a million private "finished consultant episodes" (FCEs) have to be achieved this year, regardless of how this destabilises the NHS. So the department of health's commercial directorate has been busy pressurising trusts to use ITCs.

In a survey of 100 trust chief executives published in the *Health Service Journal*, 73 percent felt the ITC programme did not offer good value for money; 56 percent said it was political; and 37 percent said it was being "enforced via bullying". But as with the contract with Alliance Medical to provide private scans (*Eyes passim*), once the government has bought in to a scheme it has to be made to work. By 2008 15 percent of NHS activity will be carried out in the private sector – whether patients want it or not.

NHS hospitals cannot compete with the unfair contracts ITCs have been given and which guarantee them work; but they have to try to survive. Hence the notion of comprehensive healthcare is being abandoned as resources are directed towards areas of healthcare that can make a profit under the new "payment by results" scheme. Alas, this – along with the "choose and book" scheme for patients – has also been hastily imposed with little thought, resulting in more missed targets and administrative chaos.

The target of 205,000 electronic bookings for hospital appointments by last month was missed by a staggering 204,937. The pathetic 63 successful e-bookings have thus far cost £195m (ie more than £3m each) and another £90m is being thrown at a system described by IT expert and GP Paul Cundy as "clunky, slow, user-unfriendly and, in our working environment, unusable".

While the DoH was vilified in the press over the failing e-booking scheme, Atos Origin, which supplied the system, got nary a mention – even though it has been receiving its full monthly payments since October (in addition to millions it earned for "development"). The department paid up even though "key milestones" and "revised milestones" weren't met, generously blaming itself, not Atos, for this.

Atos Origin (UK) Ltd is chaired by former Labour cabinet minister Lord Barnett. It took over the e-booking contract when it bought SchlumbergerSema, a firm which donated to the Labour party and was duly recompensed with various contracts. (These included one running incapacity benefit, which was a disaster.)

The big irony for Labour is that many working in the NHS aren't averse to the principles of reducing waiting, saving time by using IT and getting patients to think for themselves. But the secretive, simplistic and dictatorial way the reforms are imposed enthuses no one and is in many cases counter-productive.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

THE OPERATION WAS A SUCCESS
WAITING Room
SO, CAN WE SEE HIM?
ERR, NO, IT'S BETTER NOT TO. THERE'S BEEN A COMPLICATION...
IT'S ELECTION YEAR
ARE YOU FEELING FITTER UNDER LABOUR?
TV

SIGNAL FAILURES

Another SET up

ON 18 January the government announced that Stagecoach, FirstGroup and others were being invited to bid for the Kent rail franchise, but made no reference to the improvement in performance since state-owned South Eastern Trains (SET) took over the franchise from Connex in November 2003.

Instead, transport secretary Alistair Darling focused exclusively on future express services over the Chunnel rail link (see last *Eye*) and the improvements they would bring for the wealthy minority who can afford the premium fares.

At least that meant he avoided lying again to smear SET and justify his re-privatisation (*Eye* 1121). But others are doing his dirty work for him.

On 20 January the *Daily Telegraph* claimed monthly subsidy had risen 65 percent since SET took over the franchise. However, its article ignored official figures from the strategic rail authority (SRA) showing that in 2003-04, the monthly subsidy was about 23 percent *lower* under SET than it had been under Connex.

Halfway through the article there was a brief mention of how SET had improved punctuality by 5.5 percent in under a year. But the *Torygraph* omitted to mention massive bailouts for South West Trains, Virgin and other private franchises, or that in 1993-94, just before privatisation began, British Rail's Network South East had made a surplus of £71m, despite the recession, while the same services needed £360m subsidy in 2003-04. Instead it invited shadow transport secretary Tim Yeo to comment on behalf of a party which wants voters to believe it would cut waste and inefficiency in public services.

Yeo said SET showed that railways were "better run in the private sector". When will he learn that the privatised railway swallows five times as much subsidy as British Rail received (at today's prices) in the late 1980s?

WHEN the prime minister launched Virgin's tilting trains in September, his talk of "a result for the rail network" led passengers to believe that years of disruption on the west-coast mainline south of Crewe were over at last. But Tony Blair's beloved public-private partnerships are still making a shambles of the UK's busiest mainline, despite a £7.5bn modernisation and Virgin's whopping subsidy.

Some infrastructure renewed in the last few years already has to be replaced. Temporary speed limits (of which there were none when BR handed over to Railtrack in 1994) keep interrupting the flow of trains. And there are problems in the maintenance regime of Failtrack's successor, Network Rail.

The "slow lines" out of Euston used by Silverlink and freight trains are in such bad condition they have to be inspected frequently by workers on foot. Inspections close the slow lines and exacerbate delays as more trains squeeze on to the fast lines.

A leaked NR log shows that on the evening of 10 January a driver felt his train lurch on renewed track near Watford. The track, on the fast line for northbound trains, was found to have loose bolts where new and old rails met, and several sleepers "had not been secured to the rails at all". Virgin and Silverlink had used the unsecured track for nearly 12 hours after it was handed over by contractor Mowlem with a 50mph speed limit.

NR still uses contractors for renewals, despite reaping benefits from taking maintenance in-house. This incident shows that NR isn't always supervising contractors with the rigour demanded by the accidents and close shaves that have followed since Railtrack began leaving safety-critical engineering to contractors.

Perhaps Blair thought the west-coast headache was solved when American trouble-shooter Bechtel was called in three years ago. If Bechtel is as good as its glossy presentations at Labour conferences suggest, why is the west-coast line still dire?

UPGRADING Edinburgh Waverley rail station is said to be on the cards after Edinburgh Central MP Alistair Darling agreed last month to transfer £325m from the transport department to the Scottish Executive. This is part of his plan to devolve more rail controls to Scotland while grabbing back controls devolved decades ago to transport authorities in major English cities outside London (*Eye* 1120).

The Scottish media described the cash as "a major achievement" for Darling. He's transferred money from his department in London to the country where he's secretary of state, and it seems much of it could be spent in the city he represents. Some achievement indeed.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
MY GOD! CONRAIL have Made HUGE PROFITS AND WON A LUCRATIVE NEW FRANCHISE despite being COMPLETELY USELESS
I'M Going to make a COMPLAINT...
...YOU IDIOT! WHY DIDN'T YOU INCLUDE CONRAIL IN MY PORTFOLIO?!
FUND MANAGER
SRizelda

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

YORKSHIRE CNUTS

IGNORANCE is bliss in the Yorkshire seaside resort of Scarborough, it seems.

When the Tory borough decided to go ahead with a grandiose sea defence scheme – which some experts believed unnecessary – it illegally hired a firm of engineering consultants without putting the job out to tender.

The council officer in charge of the project, director of technical services Derek Rowell, had no engineering experience and relied on subordinates for advice. Astonishingly he claims he did not know that EU competition rules, and the council's own, required a tendering process.

Alas, the man Rowell was relying on, John Riby, an engineer in charge of day-to-day management of the scheme, was also ignorant of, or chose to ignore, procurement regulations. But he did have the nous to prepare a bogus "best value" report justifying the contract *after* doubts were raised.

The illegally-hired consultants, coastal defence experts High-Point Rendel (H-PR), decided not to carry out a detailed survey of the shore around the town's Marine Drive, relying instead on "local knowledge". Alas that knowledge was flawed and had very expensive consequences.

Needless to say Scarborough's councillors, led by one Eileen Bosomworth, hadn't a clue what was going on and so did nothing to ensure things were above board. Result: no proper survey which would have revealed that the ground was much more difficult than assumed by H-PR, meaning that building costs rose from an estimated £28.6m to more than £40m; H-PR was able to double its supervision charges from £1.2m to £2.4m; and Scarborough council taxpayers may have to cover more than £3m of government funds which could be withdrawn.

Despite a damning audit commission report, no head has rolled. Council leader Bosomworth has set up a "working group" of senior councillors, chaired not by a lawyer or an engineer but a retired headmaster, to "investigate".

At least technical services director Rowell is no longer around to take the flak. He is now "strategic director of environment services" with Isle of Wight council. There he will be able to bring his experience to bear on the island's coastal erosion problems – ably assisted by those ubiquitous sea defence experts, High-Point Rendel, who have advised IoW council and its predecessor, South Wight borough council, since 1989.

● STRATFORD-ON-AVON council prepared a newsletter before Christmas for distribution to 50,000 residents. The mailshot, which cost £9,000, carried details of arrangements for rubbish collection over the holiday, Christmas travel offers and advance notice of January public meetings, including consultations on next year's council tax. Unfortunately the newsletter wasn't posted till the end of January, when Christmas was a distant memory and the meetings had all taken place. A spokesman tells the *Eye*: "We have to put our hands up. Some information was out of date. We apologise to residents." So why bother posting the thing at all? "Er, we'll have to get back to you on that." Hopefully not by post.

Record £100m To Go To Waste In Greater Manchester

Dept for The Environment, Food And Rural Affairs website

BURTON'S AILING

BOOZING and brawling in Burton-on-Trent have reached such a level that East Staffordshire borough council is planning a "saturation policy" – effectively a ban on any new pubs in the town centre.

The council has also set up a "town centre disorder and anti-social behaviour review group" (try saying that when you're pissed) to deal with the problem.

Strangely it has not enlisted the expert assistance of one of its own members in finding out what town centre disorder is all about.

Labour councillor Doug Haw has been charged with criminal damage following an incident on 13 July last year in which a window at a store on the High St was smashed, and with assault, after an incident in a pub in the early hours of 17 December. Cllr Haw, who denies both charges, is bailed to appear before magistrates on 1 March when trial dates will be set. Although unable to lend his expertise to the town centre troublemakers' committee, Cllr Haw is a member of the licensing panel – which takes over responsibility for granting pub and club licences from magistrates this month.

FISHY BUSINESS

AS HANGOVERS clear on Shetland after last week's drinkathon-cum-Viking fire festival, Up Helly-Aa, one headache that will not go away is that resulting from Shetland Islands council's squandering of much of the £380m windfall accrued from oil companies operating out of the Sullom Voe terminal (*Eyes passim*).

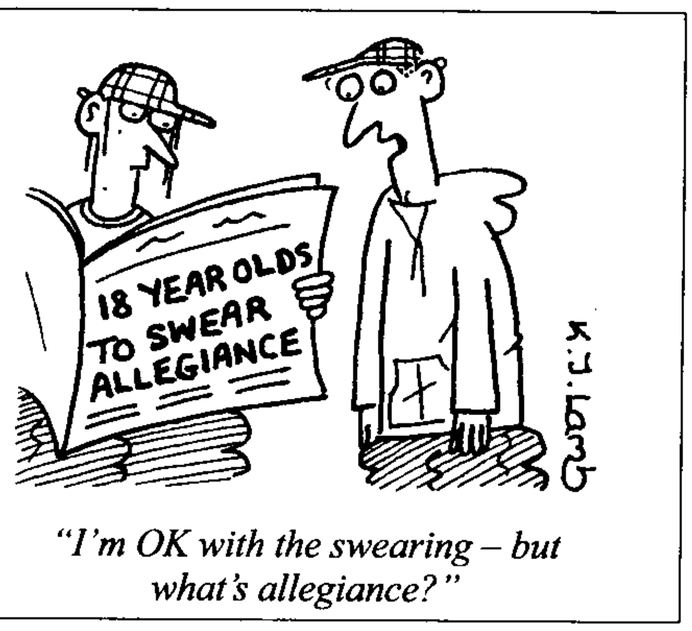
Nearly one-in-five of the island's population recently signed a petition calling for an independent public inquiry into how some £30m put into various development projects had been spent. Interest has focused on more than £7m used by the council and its associated organisations, Shetland Leasing and Property Developments (SLAP) and the Shetland Development Trust (SDT), to prop up failing fish farms. Despite this largesse, five fish farms have called in the receivers in the past year due to unsustainable losses, the most recent being Saga Seafoods, where 77 people lost their jobs.

One name keeps cropping up: Dr Alistair Goodlad, brother of the council's chief executive, Morgan Goodlad. As well as being a director of Saga Seafoods, Dr Goodlad was a director of Bressay Salmon Ltd which went under on 26 January last year. He was also a director of SSG Seafoods that went into receivership in December 2003. Most of the dosh lost by the council went on supporting these companies.

The council has refused to hold an inquiry into allegations of favouritism in the allocation of public funds. Morgan Goodlad and council convenor (leader) Sandy Cluness vigorously deny any improper conduct. But complaints have been made to the government's financial watchdog, Audit Scotland, which has launched an investigation.

Meanwhile the Shetland Development Trust, supported by the council, has agreed a loan of £250,000 to Johnson Seafarms to help it fund expansion into cod farming. Business as usual, it seems, for the UK's richest local authority.

● LOTS of readers (three) wrote to say that the South East Regional Assembly, which in the last *Eye* we said "will almost certainly never come about", already exists. We meant that an *elected* assembly is unlikely to happen. Unelected talking shops don't count.



"I'm OK with the swearing – but what's allegiance?"

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

JARVIS has had an easy escape from its PFI contract to build £50m worth of schools for Kirklees council in Yorkshire.

After local council taxpayers agreed to cough up a further £8.5m to finish the job, Jarvis managed to flog its stake in the deal to an outfit called the Secondary Market Investment Fund (SMIF).

After their horrendous experience with Jarvis, parents and schoolchildren in Kirklees might want to know who is behind the fund that is now responsible for their schools, despite SMIF chief executive Bill Doughty's reassurance to *Yorkshire Post* readers that "For the good people of Kirklees, this means that the PFI scheme is back on track. We will be a long term investor in this project."

SMIF is managed by the equally obscure private equity group Star Capital Partners, but as a "limited partnership" doesn't have to file accounts and returns like a normal company. As a result the owners of the funds, and a large interest in Kirklees' schools, may never be known. SMIF does, however, say a little about its strategy on its website: "Following acquisition, SMIF is strongly incentivised to improve the performance of infrastructure assets, with particular expertise in the financial restructuring of such projects. SMIF will seek to enhance value for its investors and co-shareholders alike." In other words, it will squeeze what cash it can out of the deal – something with which "the good people" of Kirklees may be becoming wearily familiar.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

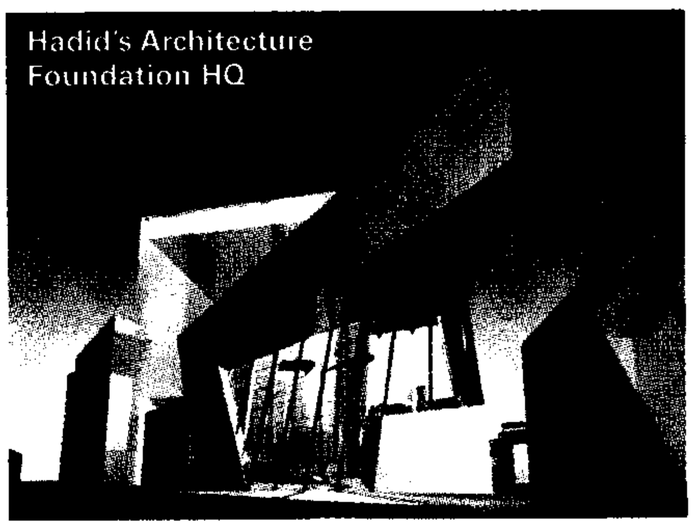
GUYS, MAX AND I AREN'T HAPPY WITH THE GAMES YOU'VE ORGANISED FOR THE KIDS' PARTY
WE LIKE TO THINK OF THEM AS "TRADITIONAL WITH A TWIST"
BUT LOOK AT THIS LIST: "VISUALLY IMPAIRED PERSON'S BLUFF," "PIN THE TAIL ON THE RESCUED DONKEY." AND THE "FREE JAZZ MUSICAL CHAIRS" LEFT THREE OF THEM IN HOSPITAL!
THEY REALLY DUG THAT COLTRANE SET

NOOKS and CORNERS

MY AWARD of the Sir Hugh Casson Medal for 2004 to the Sage Gateshead, which I described as resembling "a giant slug or a big shiny condom" (*Eye* 1122) has not gone unnoticed. The Newcastle *Journal* says it has caused a "furious backlash". David Clelland, MP for Tyne Bridge, announced that *Private Eye* is full of "rubbish" and decreed that the Sage is "fantastic. It's an incredible, futuristic design."

Meanwhile Anthony Sargent, director of the condom, thinks I just enjoy "rubbishing buildings everyone else loves... so the moment a national newspaper [*Indie*] greeted The Sage Gateshead with the headline 'Another day, another breathtaking creation from Norman Foster' – echoing near-unanimous praise throughout the print and broadcast media – we guessed Piloti would express his lofty disdain."

But *Building Design* considered the Sage "a building without parts. A building of a single, unmodulated scale. A building without top or bottom, without front or back" – like a slug or condom in fact – and "the building's river 'frontage' does nothing to establish the sense of definition that the valley requires."


Hadid's Architecture Foundation HQ

Mr Sargeant's outburst should remind us of the malign grip the superstar culture in architecture has – another example of which is the recent competition for a new home for the Architecture Foundation, "the UK's leading independent architecture centre".

Land Securities, the property developer, is paying £2.25m for a new building on a small site in Southwark to house exhibition and events space, offices and a bar. It was always clear this project would be a conspicuous promotion for cutting-edge, iconic, superstar architecture. Jay Merrick in the *Indie* could hardly contain his excitement: the winner would be chosen by a "stellar jury" from a shortlist of "a gripping mixture of big-hitters and hugely talented, but relatively little-known practices... each of them ferociously ambitious and fearlessly creative" (and only one of whom has ever built a real building in Britain).

The result was so predictable I wish I'd put money on Zaha Hadid when I saw she was shortlisted. Hadid was famous for having designed a fire station near Basel that was so impractical and dangerous firemen refused to use it. Then she achieved martyr status when her baffling design for the Cardiff Opera House was abandoned, so the profession professed to think it an outrage that this "architectural prophet... is without honour in Britain, her adopted land".

Possibly; but surely the value of this project is to show how a creative modern design could meet a complex brief while conforming to a tight urban site bounded by Stamford Street and Great Guildford Street. Hadid's design is free-standing, ignores its surroundings and "offers up a daringly jagged structural armature containing accommodation, and a completely uncluttered glasshouse zone more than three storeys high."

Such is iconic architecture: all very exciting – and a missed opportunity. No wonder a "disillusioned young architect" who had entered the competition wrote to *The Architects' Journal* to complain that, although the foundation announced it had "no prejudices as to the... fame or experience of the eventual winner", the shortlist suggested otherwise: it "read like an alumni of architectural has-beens and fashionable hacks... I would cite the inclusion of Zaha Hadid and Bernard Tschumi as bordering on the ridiculous for a project of this scale and locality."

Quite. All this prima-donna exhibitionism does little or nothing to address the real architectural problems faced by architects and the public today. These, surely, are the dominance of mediocrity and inefficiency associated with the private finance initiative system of commissioning public buildings, and the awfulness of the many houses put up by the big builders all over England to fulfil John Prescott's dream. Letting the clique of stellar designer-luvvies fix things so Zaha Hadid can show off in Southwark will do nothing to raise the standard of ordinary architecture in Britain, which is what matters.

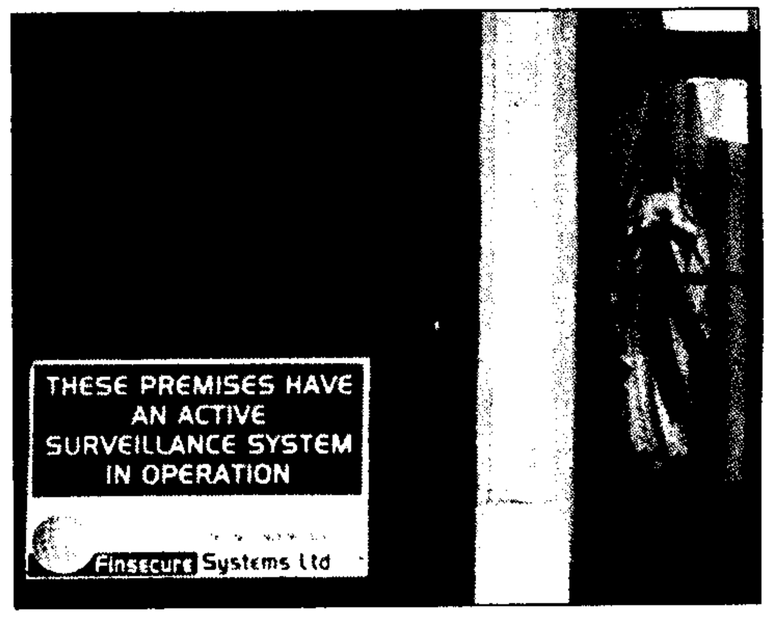
Recently *Building Design* dared to suggest shortcomings in yet another iconic design, the new Ben Pimlott Building at Goldsmiths College. This is a sort of big tin shed with a metal "scribble" sculpture stuck on, designed by Will Alsop (a member of that "stellar" jury), architect of the cancelled (hooray!) so-called Fourth Grace in Liverpool (*Eyes passim*) who has recently attracted attention to himself by proposing a continuous city from Liverpool to Hull.

Ellis Woodman was not impressed. "Take away the 3D-super-graphics and one is left with a work of shed-like gaucheness... I was left wondering whether [Alsop] is altogether an architect." But genius is not accustomed to such irreverence – especially in a paper for architects – and countered by questioning the right of the "so-called critic" to comment: "It would be instructive if you could publish Woodhead's CV so we can see what sort of splinter he is."

I'd have thought the qualifications needed for criticising masterpieces by Alsop (or Hadid or any of the stars) are clear: intelligence, an acute eye, independence of mind, commonsense and an immunity to hype and fashion. And I don't just speak of myself.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Kilmallock, Co. Limerick*



Submitted by Steve Magner. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

MOST music-punters turn up at performances assuming that what they're about to hear is programmed for artistic reasons after deep, considered soul-searching by soloists, conductors and the like. This is an innocent assumption.

In fact orchestras and opera companies only programme music they can (a) get hold of, usually by hiring; and (b) can afford. Which means that big-time hire companies like Boosey & Hawkes, which represents an awful lot of mainstream composers, end up quite literally calling the tune.

So it's worrying when a company like B&H gets power-drunk. And this, according to representatives from orchestras and ensembles throughout the UK who met recently to discuss the problem, is what has happened. Booseys recently joined forces with the German publisher Schott to streamline services and, so it said, cut costs. But the only cost-cutting has been in Booseys' favour.

Starting in a few weeks' time, all music hired from B&H will be dispatched from Germany, causing big problems for British performing groups who will no longer have access to the material before it is sent out. This is a critical consideration when requesting specific editions, specially marked parts, and other things that make the difference between good and bad performances.

Worse still, the groups will have to pay enormously inflated postage (think how much paper is involved in a complete set of orchestral parts). And if that weren't bad enough, Booseys is suddenly, and quite separately, hiking its hire charges by 10 percent – for which, needless to say, the stunned orchestras haven't budgeted.

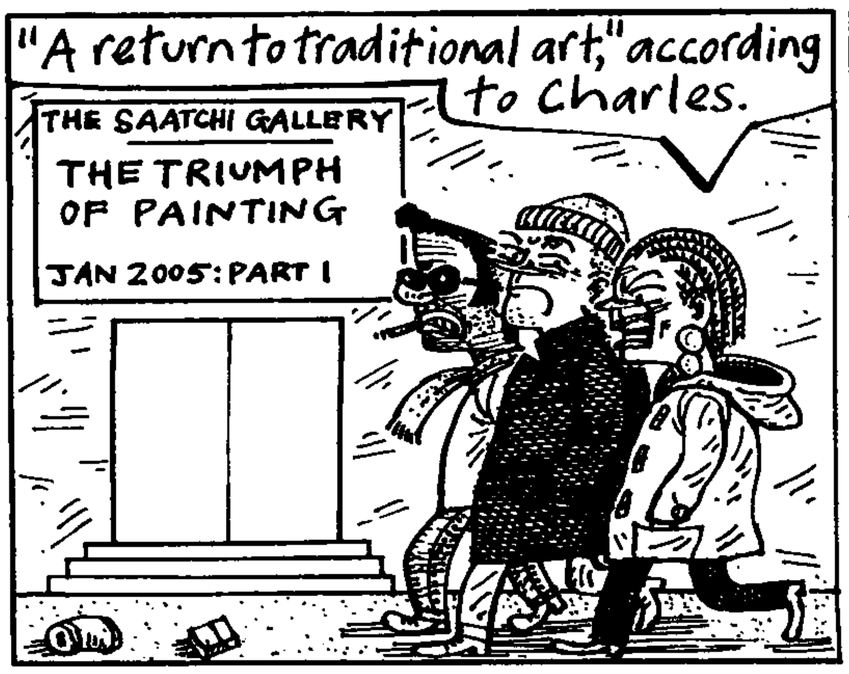
When the orchestras met they universally condemned what they called Booseys' cavalier attitude of "we're the company, so we set the charges". More particularly, the idea was mooted of a boycott against B&H composers: an extreme measure that, if it happened, would have devastating consequences for musical life in Britain. Overnight there'd be a sudden absence of vast tracts of music by Stravinsky, Britten, Richard Strauss and Prokofiev through to Birtwistle and even Peter Maxwell Davies (ok, so it's not all bad news).

Clearly the orchestras are spoiling for a fight. But who will blink first?

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH



We are the contractors Axis Europe all our operatives carry deification badges

Mail shot, Axis Construction

Letters

God knows why

Sir,

Since it seems that the general election will be held on 5 May 2005, can any of your readers explain why Tony Blair has selected Ascension Day? Delusions of grandeur? Or did the Vicar of St Albion's forget to check his diary?

Yours faithfully,
C.F. DUCHET,

Chepstow.

Lookalike

Bush

Alexander

Sir,

Have you noticed the resemblance between Alexander The Great (as played by Colin Farrell in the latest Hollywood blockbuster) and George Dubya who plays the role of President of the USA?

Could these two wannabe conquerors of the Near East be in some way related to one another? If so, er, perhaps it's better that we not be told.

TARQUIN THYROID,

London, NW5.

Wail from Wales

Sir,

Private Eye's had years of fun at the expense of Neil Kinnock, and this issue's Diary is no exception, except that your mis-spelling's probably given him the biggest laugh – three times over: "Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty"; "Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty"; "Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty".

The correct Welsh spelling's Bedwellty.

Yn Gywir,
ADRIEN JONES,

Llandeilo, Carms.

Ancient mariner?

Sir,

As a practising Christian (I have been practising for 74 years and still cannot get the hang of it) I was deeply shocked to read on page 18 of issue 1123 of your admirable organ that Noah was 81 at the time of the Great Flood. The Bible says (Genesis Ch. 7, v. 6) that Noah was 600 years old when he entered the Ark. One expects such inaccuracies in other papers but not in yours. In The Hebrew Myths Robert Graves also gives Noah's age at embarkation as 600 and adds that it took him 52 years to build the Ark and God delayed the flood until it was finished. Even then there was a month's further delay so that Noah could go to his grandfather's funeral. Certainly the Bible says that Noah's grandfather died in the year of the Deluge but it does not say whether this was before, or as a result of that catastrophe. I remain,

One of your oldest and happiest readers,
THOMAS DYER, Brain of Britain 1976,

London SW12.

Badgers and TB

Sir,

Muckspreader overdid the crap in his spreading machine when he wrote his "bad badger" story.

Krebbs did not confirm any link between badgers and TB in cattle: he recommended the trials to ascertain the facts.

The Four Counties Trial in Ireland is not so clear cut as Muckspreader has implied and all the background data is not yet available. Even after the badger slaughter, the Irish TB figures are still twice that in England. So badgers are not the villains that Muckspreader says they are.

In most cases where badgers have been caught and live tested for TB, they are found to be clear on subsequent tests; and neither do badgers suffer and die of TB so eliminating them is not necessary or kind. Badger numbers are not out of control, as the last two years of summer drought in 2003 and a dry spring in 2004 have in fact caused a drop in numbers.

Removing legal protection for badgers and returning to the bad old days of badger persecution would only benefit badger baiters and other weirdoes and do nothing to improve the health of cattle. As farmers know, modern farming methods and cattle movements are the real culprit. Let's rely on scientific facts and not muckspreading!

Badgers are not responsible for the huge subsidies in the agriculture industry and Muckspreader should know this!

Yours,
CLAIRE EGAN,

Bristol.

Sir,

Re. Muckspreader and badger culling.

As a farmer I do not concur with culling badgers whereas Muckspreader would have your readers believe it is a unanimous view among farmers. He promotes the principle that troubles are always caused by someone or something else, preferably something that does not have a say in the matter, eg the animals. Perhaps he should consider that the widespread and unkind practice of transporting cattle huge distances to buy them, sell them and slaughter them is a first-class method of spreading disease, to say nothing of the common dairy herd practice of hiring a bull to serve the herd. A bull that has been with a herd containing undetected infected cows can be quickly moved a long distance to a previously uninfected herd. Cattle lorries move faster and further than badgers.

I run a closed herd and have had no diseases, plagues, pestilences, BSE, F&M, TB or brucellosis in my 14 years here although some of these things have been in the vicinity.

Muckspreader's projected cost to the taxpayers of compensation for slaughter of TB-infected cattle is £2bn, this being the total figure projected out to 2014. As this government (also infected with TB) is not favourably disposed to farmers I cannot see this amount of money being allowed to reach them. Between now and 2014 there is abundant time for even the most lethargic politicians and bureaucrats to wise up to this handout and stop it ere it prolong something useful like farming.

Badgers are territorial. If left alone they stay where they are. If culled another lot move in to take up their space. The new ones could bring infection.

I would be interested to know the methods that would be used if, as Muckspreader proposes, farmers were licensed to cull infected badgers and how the farmer would determine (before killing them, not afterwards) that the badgers were infected.

Sorry to distress the Fighty Mucker but some of us farmers are so unhinged that we actually enjoy having wildlife on our land, and not for viewing through a set of sights, either.

Yours faithfully,
MIKE SQUIRES,

Carmarthen.

Scenes You Seldom See

"My player is entirely guilty of the offence and I personally guarantee he'll be punished severely"

Sir,

I do not know the identity of Muckspreader but he is absolutely on the ball regarding the inexorable spread of bovine tuberculosis across England. Those of us over this side of the pond with an interest in this disease have looked on with amazement as this problem has become dire in the UK. One cannot blame our scientific colleagues in England who are outstanding but appear to have their hands tied as your correspondent points out.

PROFESSOR IAN ORME,

Dept of Microbiology, Immunology & Pathology, Colorado State University, USA.

LUVVIES

Fresh from playing the central character in the Bridget Jones novels, actress Renee Zellweger is to turn her own hand to writing. Zellweger, 33, said she planned to write "fiction, non-fiction, whatever I'm feeling when I pick up the pen."

Metro

Submitted by Sean McManus.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Our father...

Sir,

I note your reference in HP Sauce to Tam Dalyell as the leader of the House. This would be amusing, considering his distaste for his party's current foreign policy, but what Backbiter meant to say was that he is the father of the House – ie its longest-serving MP.

The leader of the House is Peter Hain.

DAVID FARMBROUGH,

Brentford.

Dead reckoning

Sir,

I fear you exaggerate the real estate skills of Lady Porter (Slicker, Eye 1124, p. 29) by more than 600 percent.

It is wicked and unfair to suggest that she sold three cemeteries for a pound. Regretfully the market was not so buoyant in those days and only 15p was realised. I am old enough to remember when you got 20 cemeteries to the pound.

JIM NEILL,

London NW1.

Ad nauseam

Sir,

I hope the irony was not lost on your ad sales department when the buyers for the Not Only But Always DVD called up to place the full-colour back-page ad (Eye 1124) for a production which the Eye (1123) accurately parodied as a nonsense biography of Peter Cook.

With Sky News previously advertising in the Eye, I wonder if there is a recent competition within the ad sales department to make the most ironic sale.

As always, keep up the good work.

J. CAMPBELL,

London.

Herd mentality

Sir,

Nick Wray's MP, Bob Laxton, needs more briefing on the ID card bill (Eye 1124).

Under current plans compulsory ID cards **will** *be imposed on Scotland. The Scottish Executive will be able to decide if the cards will be used to restrict access to devolved services, that is all. The people of Scotland – along with the rest of the UK – will still be required to attend registration sessions where we will be scanned, numbered and indexed like so much cattle.*

Yours,
TREVOR MENDHAM,

Coordinator, NO2ID Scotland, www.no2id-scotland.net

Dull Letter Found

Sir,

Your complete lack of scientific savvy rears its head again. Your "Dull Planet Found" headline makes no sense, as the Huygens space probe landed on Saturn's **moon**, *Titan. A planet is a body which orbits its sun, while a moon is a body which orbits a planet. The article is therefore about "perhaps the most boring* **moon** *in the solar system".*

Yours orbitrarily,
SIMON WILLIAMS,

Scoriton, Devon.

The snooze quiz

Sir,

You report (1124) that Simon Hoggart had an easy ride on the first broadcast of The News Quiz this year. This continued with the second episode in which Francis Wheen managed to sneak in a mild jibe along the lines of "that's rich coming from you" which was greeted heartily by the audience but not one member of a normally quick-witted and acerbic panel followed this up.

It does seem strange that the team is normally happy enough to put the boot in when others are caught with their trousers down (Angus Deayton, Boris Johnson, et al) and yet be so soft on Hoggart.

Yours,
PETER KENT,

Angus beef

Sir,

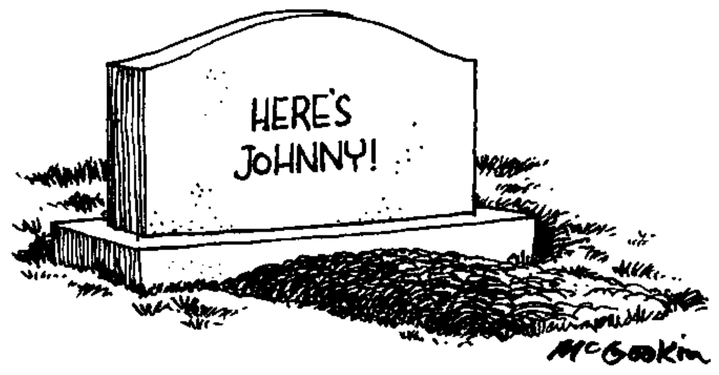
Your article (1124) on the forthcoming BBC Scotland series The Gathering Place contained a number of inaccuracies, not least of which was the assertion that the producer had revealed that the programmes "will include no interviews whatsoever with politicians who had criticised the project". Not only did he not "reveal" this, it is not true.

The Gathering Place is an observational documentary series that follows key characters through events that unfold over a number of years. It does not seek either to represent or to suppress any particular viewpoint in telling what has become a lengthy and complex story. The films will make very clear the level of opposition and debate that have surrounded the project over the last five years. Politicians of many persuasions have played a part in the story of the Holyrood building and viewers will be given the opportunity to draw their own conclusions when the series is transmitted.

Yours faithfully,
EWAN ANGUS,

Commissioning Editor Television, BBC Scotland.

U.S. CHAT KING DIES



Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Sheffield Wednesday have put the cat amongst the bag."
Reporter, BBC1
(A. Williams)

"Yes, Robbie Savage's a lovely feller, but when he's on the pitch he holds no bars..."
GARY SPEED, Radio 5 Live
(Paul Forshaw)

"He [Souness] has just gone behind my back in front of my face."
CRAIG BELLAMY, Sky Sports News
(Joe Cox)

"He [Ken Bates] has never been afraid to shirk any responsibilities."
NORMAN HUNTER, Radio 5 Live
(Chris Campling)

"Manchester United is a huge hurdle and we are keeping our feet on the ground."
IAN HUXHAM (Exeter City MD)
(Patrick Hughes)

SOLUTIONS

"Samsonite travel solutions" — *suitcases*

"Saint-Gobain Glass Solutions" — *glaziers*

"Picture Hanging Solutions" — *packet of hooks*

"Professional Funding Solutions" — *loans*

"Transport Information Solutions" — *railway signals*

"Floral Delivery Solutions" — *bouquets*

"Vehicle Remarketing Solutions" — *second hand cars*

"Fastsigns: digital sign solutions, signage and other signs solutions" — *signs*

All submitted by readers

Painting by numbers

Sir,

Re: Mayfair: Grosvenor Chapel. The recent article in your venerable Nooks & Corners column regarding the Grosvenor Chapel raises some fundamental issues of conservation and church architecture. There are 17 layers of paint on the panelling of the Grosvenor Chapel and each provides a memory of the particular decorative and liturgical fashion of its time. The proposal to return to Benjamin Tindall's 1730s colour scheme is a non-destructive and reversible continuation of this tradition. If an additional coat of paint assists the chapel's continuation as a place of worship, rather than joining the 50 or so churches made redundant each year, I am sure that the sainted founder of your column would not have been too displeased.

Yours faithfully,
PATRICK W. CRAWFORD,

Caroe & Partners, Chartered Architects.

"The system of self-reporting deaths which operated at the time was clearly inadequate."

Grauniad

Little Italy

Sir,

Piloti is wobbly on the empty churches of Ancoats (1124) but the heart is in the right place as usual.

St Peter's was Anglican though it looks RC with its red-brick campanile and crossed keys. It is in good hands, restoration is well advanced and it has a promising future as a textile centre.

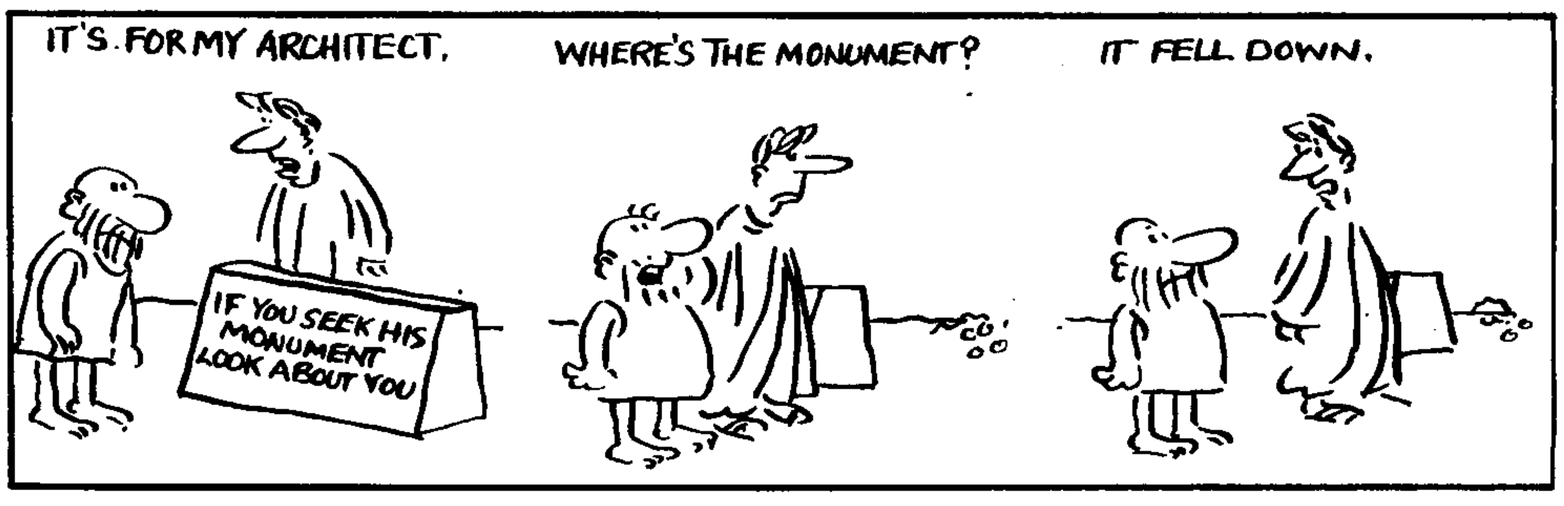
St Michael's, just around the corner, was closed in a reorganisation of RC parishes which took insufficient account of Mancunian-Italian community loyalties and the influx of new city-centre residents like me. Without unscrambling the diocese's hard-won reform of parish boundaries, the building could be reopened tomorrow as a chapel of ease. And why not, since that is how it began 150 years ago?

Yours,
MICHAEL HEBBERT,

Manchester.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Tirana**

from Our Own Correspondent

AS WE sit and talk among the insanely colourful concrete monstrosities of Tirana, for which we must thank our eccentric mayor Edi Rama, we wonder if Albania is to be the next basket case country to get the "people's revolution" treatment.

What's good enough for Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine ought to be good enough for the hermit of the Balkans. We even have a youth/civic movement called *Mjaft!* (*Enough!*), led by a fresh-faced, US-educated chap named Erion Veliaj and at times funded by the legendary philanthropist, destroyer of currencies and toppler of governments, George Soros.

Mjaft! has been organizing mass demonstrations against prime minister Fatos Nano for nearly two years but to remarkably little effect. As Trotsky said, revolution is impossible until it becomes inevitable. We're firmly in the impossible phase.

Nano spent most of last year denying that he helped run guns to the Kosovo Liberation Army in the late 1990s. There is a mysterious audio tape that supposedly captures the great man nodding through the weapons. Responding to such allegations, he said it was morally defensible to help our Kosovo brethren in their struggle against Slobbo.

Part of the problem is that no one in Albanian politics seems much better than Nano. Sali Berisha, opposition leader, is Nano's bête noir. But Berisha is thoroughly compromised and discredited. He was booted out as prime minister in 1997 when a massive pyramid scheme collapsed, prompting our descent into anarchy and the looting of the armed forces' armouries. No doubt the two men sincerely loathe one another, but they enjoy a symbiotic relationship as far as many of us are concerned.

Another name recently in the frame is that of Leku Zog, the pretender to the throne who launched a political party. Those hoping for a radical alternative were disappointed: Zog leapt into bed with Nano and was plagued by allegations of… gun running in South Africa (the sort of colourful touch we appreciate).

With a GDP per head of £600 or so, most people long ago gave up any real interest in politics. Their principal ambition is to emigrate – as you Brits may have noticed in a range of enterprises centring on your Soho district. Moreover, the government does precious little governing outside the capital and coastal towns, so interest in our political affairs counts as an esoteric subject.

The north-east rejects Nano for mainly tribal reasons, so Nano rejects them. The region gets little or no electricity, virtually no government funds and is allowed to run its own affairs by default. The police in Bajram Curri, a town in the Tropoje region bordering Kosovo, run a robber kingdom. Fatmir Haklaj, the deputy police chief, won the job (and control of most activities in the town) by murdering his predecessor. He now cruises the town in a Mercedes jeep borrowed from the UN during the Kosovo crisis in 1999, and has anti-aircraft guns on the roof of his house to discourage visitors.

The best the government can do to establish its writ here is to have ShISh, the intelligence service, run informant networks. But cooperation with ShISh is frowned upon, as one unfortunate nark discovered a couple of years ago when local hoods fitted her with a remotely-detonated explosive collar. She was allowed to run around Bajram Curri for a while before the button was pushed, *pour encourager les autres*.

Meanwhile thousands of Italian troops and Guardia di Finanza officers mill around in expensive sunglasses, supposedly to stop trafficking in people, drugs and arms. Most of us regard them as a half-hearted attempt to repeat the Italian protectorate of the inter-war years. And if all we have to look forward to is the sort of law and order Italy enjoys, they might as well pack up now. In fact, we might as well pack up too. See you on Greek Street!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "I must be just about the only person on the planet who's ever witnessed his own funeral," Dane Squires told reporters outside his sister's house in Toronto, "and I still can't quite believe it's happened. I'd been away from the city for a while, and hadn't called anyone to say where I was. But when I called by at my sister's house to tell her I was back in town, she took one look at me, screamed, and fainted. When she'd recovered, she told me that everyone else in the family was down at the funeral home, watching me being cremated. At first I thought she was joking, but once I'd realised she was serious, I jumped into a taxi and got there as fast as I could, just in time to hear the final tributes, to see my coffin disappear into the flames, and to sign the book of condolences. It was a moving sight."

Earlier, his sister Diana Branton had explained how this unusual situation had arisen. "Dane hadn't been answering his phone for several days, so I was already worried about him. Then a week ago, I read a newspaper article about an unidentified man who'd been killed by a GO Transit commuter train. The physical description sounded like Dane, so next day I called the police, and made the trip to the morgue. Before the coroner's officials pulled back the sheet, they told me that the dead man had severe facial injuries, and might be unrecognisable. But when I saw the body, I was sure it was Dane, because of the wig, the mole, and the buck teeth. So I made a positive identification, and left. On the day of the funeral, I was feeling sad and couldn't bear to go, so I stayed at home while the rest of the family went to mourn Dane. Otherwise he'd never have known about his funeral until it was too late. I don't suppose now we'll ever know who the dead man really was."

Later, Dane added, "It's been extraordinary, reading my own obituary in the newspaper, smelling my own flowers, and attending my own funeral. I'm thinking of changing my name to Jesus." *(CBC Toronto, 17/9/04. Spotter: John Gill)*

● "It's a fun service, but it also has a serious purpose," Patti Keller of the Cingular Wireless mobile phone company told reporters at a press conference in Tucson, Arizona. "Have you have ever been stuck on a really boring date, and wanted to leave without hurting the other person's feelings? If you have, then you'll realise that the Escape-a-Date feature on our new mobile phones can be a blessing.

"When you access it, the Escape-a-Date service will offer you one of eight randomly generated messages, all for an additional $4.95 a month. If your dinner date is a disaster, simply slip off to the bathroom, and call the service. Then ten minutes later, your phone will ring, and you just have to answer it and follow the instructions, which might tell you to 'put a shocked look on your face,' or say, 'What? My pet iguana has escaped from its cage?' This is an example of what you might hear:

" 'Hi. This is your Escape-a-Date. If you're looking for an excuse, I've got it. Just repeat after me and you'll soon be on your way home. [Pause] Not again! Why does that always happen to you? [Pause] Alright, I'll be there. [Pause] Now, put the phone down, tell your date that your room mate has got locked out of the house and that you have to go home to let them in. Problem solved! Goodbye and good luck'." *(Arizona Daily Star, 29/7/04. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

– ● –

● *Operation Bat is a new police initiative aimed at tackling the number of crimes against bats. It provides a standard operation*

procedure for the police to deal with bat-related offences. To report a bat crime, you should contact your local police station and speak to a Wildlife Crime Officer. You should also inform the Bat Conservation Trust helpline: tel 0845 1300 228. All bats and their roosts are protected by law. (Parish Pump News, Autumn 2004. Spotter: David Blunt)

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo

And this week I'm writing to you all from Switzerland, where I have had the privilege of addressing church leaders from all over the world, in one of the most important oecumenical gatherings ever held.

We met in the beautiful city of Davos nestling in the shadow of the Alps, which in the days before global warming used to be covered in snow.

Not that you can put everything down to global warming, of course, as I was quick to tell all the delegates who had come from every corner of the world to hear what I had to say!

Like so many things in life, I explained to them, it's not that easy!

No, my main message at the interfaith forum was to try to dispel some of the misconceptions which have grown up around my friend the Rev Dubya!

For some reason, a lot of people lately have been accusing the Rev Dubya of being something of a "warmonger", for his great crusade to rid the world of evil!

And I have to say that some of those people were here at the meeting, including Monsignor Chirac and Pastor Schroeder.

Hey, I have the greatest respect for both of these spiritual leaders of our age. But, honestly, you would have to go far to find anyone more childish and ignorant than these two!

As I tried to tell them, I know Rev Dubya very much better than they do – in fact probably better than anyone else in the world!

Wasn't it me after all, who he rang up and said "Tony, you're going to support me on this great crusade whether you like it or not".

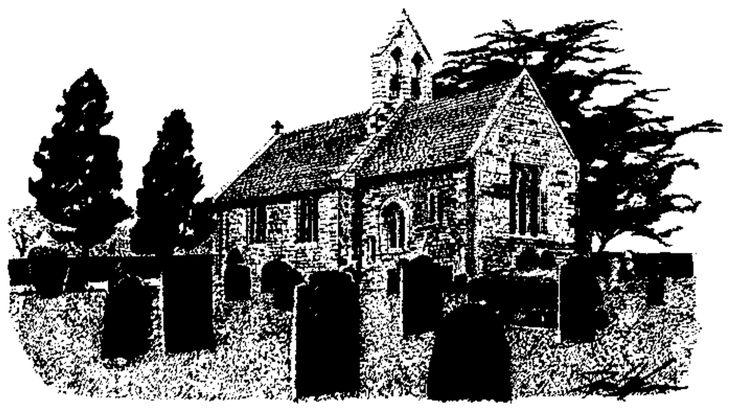
And haven't I on so many occasions broken bread with the Rev Dubya in the Great Hall of the Tabernacle of the Morons?

Yea, I have been permitted to join in prayer with Sister Condy and Brother Rumsfeld, as they entreated the Lord to grant them "war in our time", and to agree that they were righteous in all they had done to pursue that goal!

I know the Rev Dubya, and I know that, since he was anointed by his grateful congregation to serve them for another four years as the Chief Moron, he is very much a changed man!

No longer is he a warmonger, as our fainthearted European brethren try to make out.

Not of course that he was ever a warmonger. He was merely a mighty warrior in the cause of peace!



Haven't they read the Good Book, where Our Lord lays down his doctrine of the pre-emptive strike, in those inspiring words "If your neighbour looks as though he may be about to strike you on the cheek, make sure you hit him first" *(St Paul Wolfowitz's Letter to the Neo-Corinthians)*?

No, I can personally vouch for the fact that my friend Dubya has been very much misunderstood by almost everyone.

But I hear people say "If you're such a good friend of his, why can't you get him to see sense when it comes to the great moral issues of our time, such as global warming, world poverty and the Middle East?"

But, hey, that's not how you relate with someone of the stature of Rev Dubya!

No, you don't just tell him he's wrong. You listen attentively to his point of view, and then you very carefully, step by step, spell out to him exactly why you agree with him!

That's how it works! That's what we call a true partnership – working together as one to achieve his common goal!

No wonder the delegates here in Davos (from the Greek "Dav", meaning "free" and "os", meaning a winter holiday) repeatedly gave me a standing ovation in the middle of my speech, as they got up from their chairs to leave the room!

Yours,

Tony

MISSION TO AFRICA

The Vicar would like to make it plain that the mission to Africa is his responsibility, and his alone.

He has been preaching about how he will abolish poverty and Aids for a very long time, and therefore does not appreciate it when other people in the parish come along late in the day and try to earn a few "Brownie points" (no clues there!) by having his photograph taken swanning around Africa pretending to show concern for people's problems, and kissing any children he could get his hand on! This is the kind of thing that should be left to a fully-qualified man of the cloth and missionary, not some Johnny-come-lately who ought to be staying at home doing the job he's meant to do, i.e. trying to get his sums to add up which they so obviously don't!

When it comes to compassion and heartwarming concern for others, I think I can honestly say I'm the man for the job.

The vicar tells Mr Clarke, from the Neighbourhood Watch, about a suspicious figure in the parish who is out to get him! As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

Homes for the homeless

We are happy to report a success in the Vicar's ongoing campaign to help out the disabled and the unemployed, who are often particularly vulnerable to the threat of homelessness. Mr "B" (David has particularly asked us not to give his full name) lost his job just before Christmas, through no fault of his own. He was therefore faced with the prospect of having to lose his home and "sleep rough" (believed to be a reference to Mrs Fortier). But thanks to the vicar's personal initiative, Mr "B" has been allowed to stay on in his home, funded by the parish, until such a time as he gets his job back, which will be in May!

St Albions's Primary School

Mr Twiggy writes: I would like to thank everyone who helped to make our special Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Awareness Week such a success! The 5-year-olds in the reception class particularly enjoyed our revised Shakespeare production, "Romeo and Julian". Also much enjoyed by the older pupils (7-8-year-olds) was our visit to The Florence Nightingale Dyke Experience in Soho's colourful Old Compton Street. And I haven't even got room to mention my own combination, a history lecture with slides on "Ladyboys Through The Ages"! S.T.

£ CHERIETY APPEAL £

The Vicar's wife will shortly be flying to Australia to lend a hand in raising money for a number of her favourite causes, one of which is the Blair Foundation Fund which helps retired vicars and their wives to live in greater comfort in an agreeable period residence in Ratrun Place (still vacant for letting, rental reduced to an amazing £32,000 per week. Apply c/o vicarage at once).

Cherie will be addressing gatherings of important local ladies about life in the vicarage in the following major cities:

Goolagong, Digger's Bottom, Kangarooni Falls, Sheila Springs, Bradman Rock, Kellytown, Alan Botney Bay, Didgeridoo, Abo's End ...and many more.

Tickets still available from Booth Charity Vacations, c/o the Vicarage. £13,000 per ticket (flight not included). Book now to avoid disappointment.

Mr O'Brien writes:

A special "hello" or rather "halal" to all our Muslim readers who we are delighted to welcome into our flock. We are very keen for you all to join in the life of St Albion by voting for the vicar when the PCC elections come round. We know that you Muslims are sensible people, far too sensible to be fooled by the likes of local solicitor Michael Howard who as you all know is well, not one of us, or indeed, one of you and therefore cannot be trusted on important local issues like Palestine. Allah be with you!

Mr O'Brien, co-chair
Muslims For The Vicar Committee
c/o The vicarage

YOUTH CLUB

For those of you who missed the vicar's exciting interview with June Swoon on the St Albion sixth form youth FM radio station here are the highlights:

What is our favourite band? Whoever young people like...er it says here Grace Kelly, oh no that's the answer to the next question.

Who was your pin-up when you were at school?
Ruth Kelly. I really fancied her... oh, no, er...I mean Gene Kelly... oh, sorry, Kelly Holmes.

Have you ever given your wife any flowers?
Franz Ferdinand...or is it Rio Ferdinand? I'm afraid I've got to "wing it daddyo" as you say, isn't it cool in here? Ciao baby.

Who Is Who In The Iraqi Elections

Death

POPULAR candidate with a lot of experience in the region. Would pursue a strategy of mass slaughter.

Famine

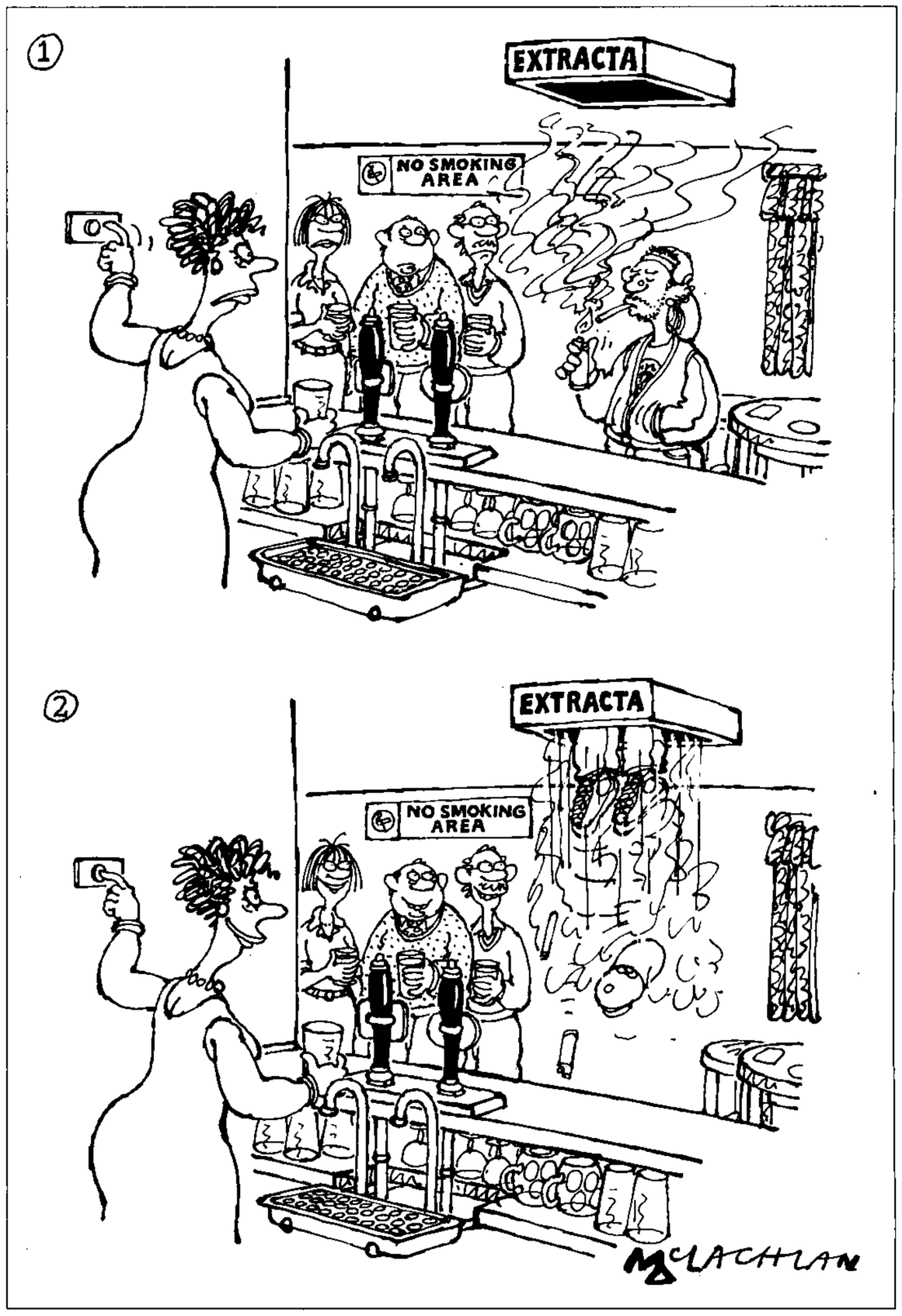
CURRENTLY an outsider but, post-election, could play a major role in Iraq's future.

War

CONTROVERSIAL figure who, if elected, can be counted on to uphold the policy of national destruction.

Plague

PROMOTING own agenda at present, but is prepared to work in an alliance with Death, War and Famine factions if necessary *(That's enough. Ed.)*



That All-Purpose Iraqi Election Leader

Day of Destiny... Moment of History... Huge turn-out... Defying terrorists... Ballots not bullets... Step forward for democracy... Day of Destiny.. Men and women patiently waiting... And still they come... Moment of History... Hard days ahead... Difficult problems to resolve... One step at a time... Harsh realities... We've no idea what's going on.

© All Newspapers.

TORIES' FURY AT LABOUR'S SMEAR

LOOK at these two pictures. One is of Fagin, the Jewish caricature invented by the fascist Dickens to promote anti-semitism in Victorian England. The other shows the present Conservative leader as he appears in an advertisement for the Labour Party.

SEE ANY SIMILARITIES?

● Fagin has a beard. And so doesn't Michael Howard.

● Fagin wears a large, black hat. And neither does Michael Howard.

● Fagin doesn't wear glasses. And so does Howard.

The pictures speak for themselves. It is time to arrest Tony Blair under Mr Blunkett's Religious Hatred laws and put him in prison without trial for ever.

© All Tory Newspapers.

CHRIS SMITH ADMITS 'I AM LAB POSITIVE'

by Our Political Staff **Lunchtime O'Cruise**

THE FORMER Culture Secretary, Mr Chris Smith, has admitted publicly that for the past 17 years he has been "a member of the Labour Party".

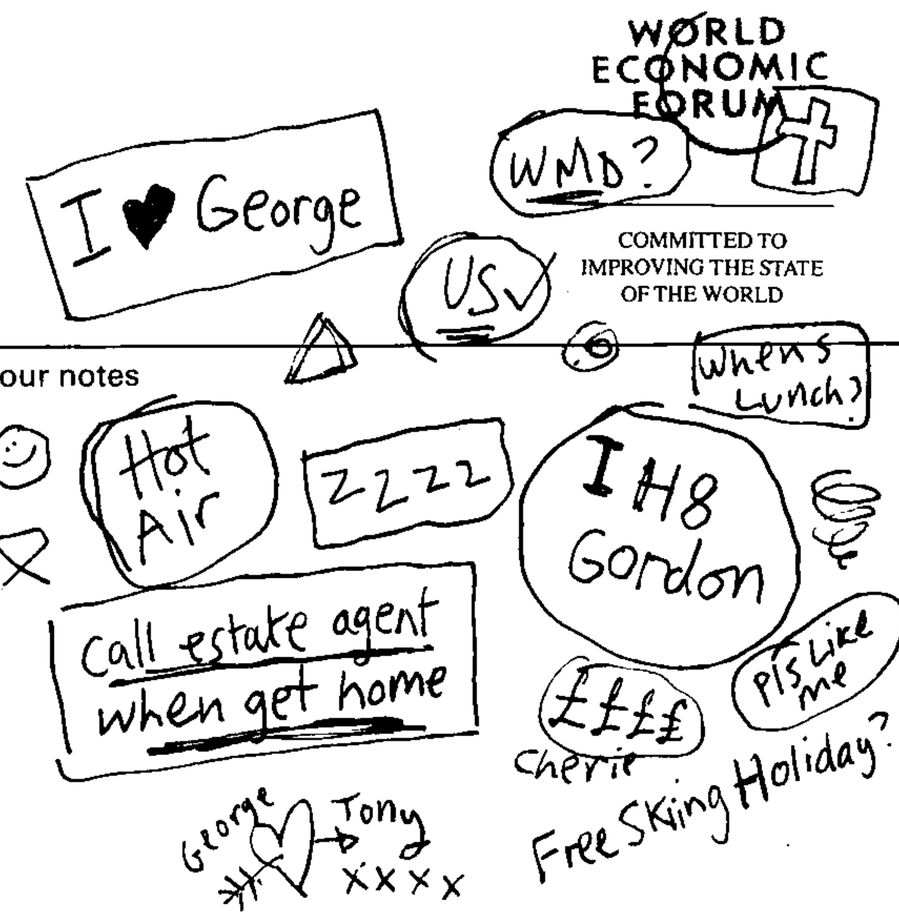
Mr Smith has decided to go public to help "remove the stigma" that so often accompanies Labour membership.

He confessed to reporters, "I did not tell Tony Blair at the time that I was Labour because I thought he would disapprove. But now he has come to accept it".

Mr Blair in turn praised Mr Smith for his "courageous stance in making his condition public".

"Chris is a role model," he said, "but there is no room for his sort in my government."

BLAIR'S REAL DAVOS DOODLE



For your notes

ALL-NIGHT 'SITTING' TO GO AHEAD

by Our Political Staff **Lunchtime O'Binge**

POLICE and religious groups have condemned plans to re-introduce 24-hour sitting for members of parliament in the House of Commons.

Under new regulations the MPs can carry on voting "round the clock", despite the obvious problems associated with it.

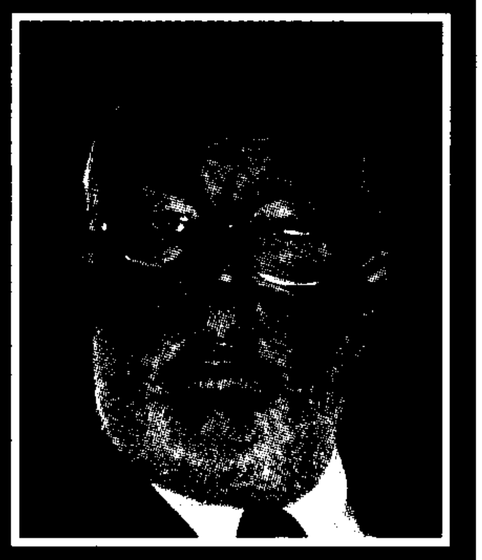
A senior policeman told the *Eye*: "It is hard enough to control these people as it is – just imagine what they will be like if they can stay there all night drinking, voting and getting up to no good."

He continued: "After about 11 o'clock, these people lose control completely. They congregate in rival gangs and shout abuse at each other before falling asleep in heaps. Someone has to clear up the mess they leave behind, and the community deserves better."

ON OTHER PAGES

● ***WIN A DAY OUT WITH THE YORKSHIRE RIPPER!*** 94

WHY CAN'T WE GET RID OF THIS BEARDED FUNDAMENTALIST?



HIS OUTRAGEOUS views are an attack on everything this country holds sacred. He believes that we should turn back the clock to the bad old days when you could lock people up without a trial and with no evidence. Yet he will stop at nothing to spread fear and terror throughout *(cont. p. 94)*

CLARKE IN NEW HOUSE ARREST SHOCK

by Our Political Staff **Christopher Howse-Arrest**

THE HOME Secretary Mr Charles Clarke today unveiled his controversial new plan which will allow an individual to be detained indefinitely inside his house.

The individual in question is a Mr T. Blair, who, Mr Clarke believes, "should never come out of Number Ten Downing Street again".

Mr Blair is under the constant surveillance of a policeman outside his door and, according to secret evidence seen by the Home Secretary, "is a terrific Prime Minister and has been involved in all sorts of peaceful activities around the world".

War On Error

Said Mr Clarke, "It may look as though I am acting like a dictator, but the need to have this man in Number Ten outweighs all objections on the grounds of civil liberties."

CRIME SOARS TO NEW LOW

by Our Home Affairs Staff **Malcolm Mugger**

THE HOME Secretary Mr Charles Clarke last night proclaimed an astonishing breakthrough in the fight against crime.

"Since Labour came to power in 1997," he said, "we have seen crime plummeting to a record new high. This is a total vindication of Tony Blair's claim when he came to power that his government would be tough on crime and even tougher on the statistics of crime."

THOSE NEW CRIME FIGURES IN FULL

Violent crimes *(not including violence)*	**DOWN by 8%**
Violent crimes *(including violence)*	**UP by 74%**
Eating apple at wheel of vehicle	**UP by 1001%**
Alien abductions	**DOWN by 105%**
Hunting with dogs	**UP by 5,000,000%**
Binge-smoking	**DOWN by 850%**
Wearing Nazi Regalia in Public Places	**NO CHANGE – Conservative gain**

THAT 10-POINT PLAN TO BEAT TERRORISM IN FULL

1 All terror suspects must stay in their own homes at all times.

2 Electronic tagging will ensure that terror suspects cannot climb out of the bathroom window without being detected by satellite surveillance.

3 Terror suspects will not be allowed access to the internet, mobile phones or carrier pigeons.

4 Terror suspects will be subjected to disorientation techniques by forcing them to listen to tapes of Mr Clarke's speeches in a continuous loop.

5 Bonafide terrorists will be permitted to operate without hindrance in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights.

6 Er...

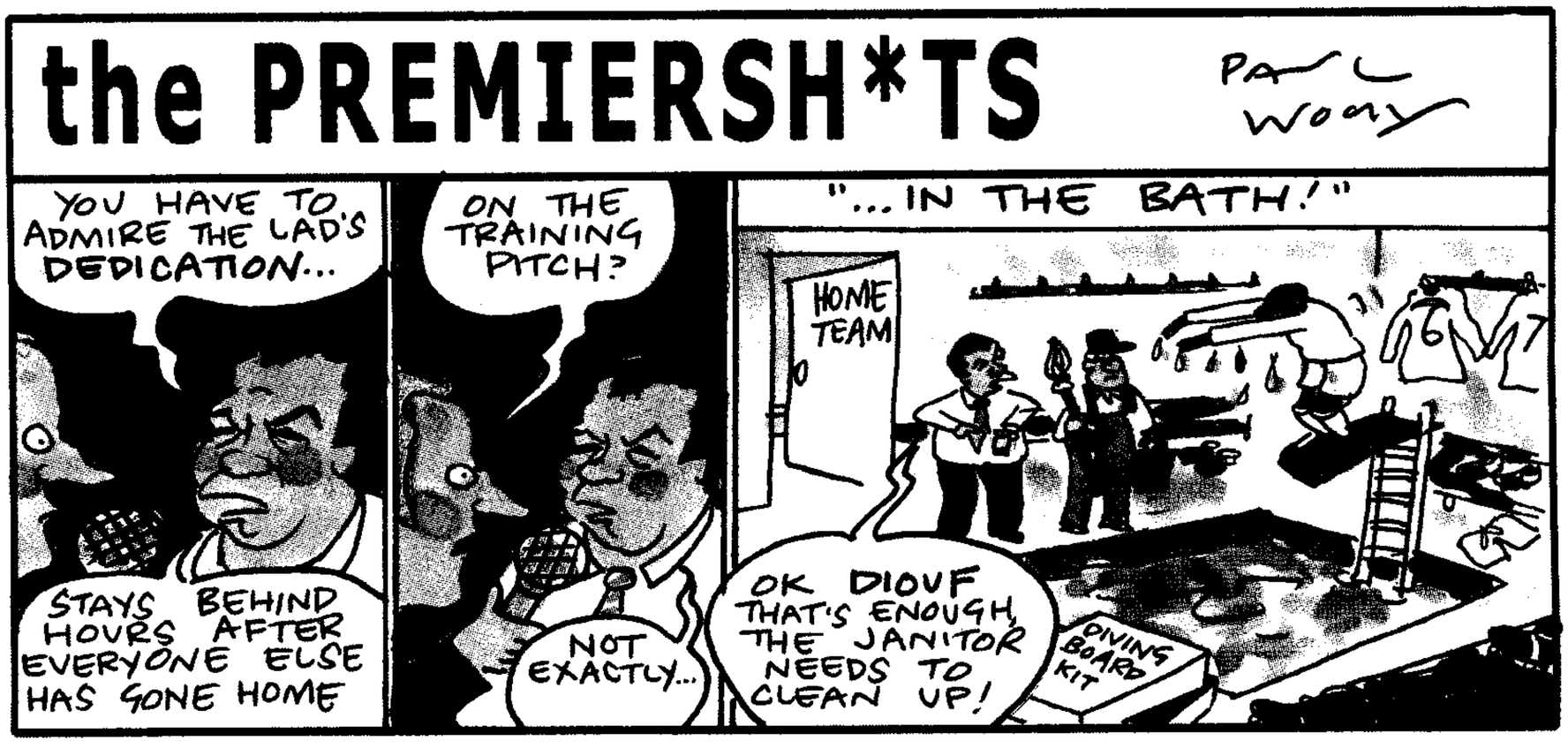
7 ...That's it.

New Oxford Entrance Examination

General Paper

(Time allowed: 3 hours)

1. Are you resident outside the United Kingdom?
2. Do you have lots of money?
3. Welcome to Oxford.


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE THE LAD'S DEDICATION...
STAYS BEHIND HOURS AFTER EVERYONE ELSE HAS GONE HOME
ON THE TRAINING PITCH?
NOT EXACTLY...
"...IN THE BATH!"
HOME TEAM
OK DIOUF THAT'S ENOUGH, THE JANITOR NEEDS TO CLEAN UP!
DIVING BOARD KIT

What You Missed

The Today Programme

Jim Naughtie *(for it is he)*: The general election is still months away, but already the public is bored with it. Where have the politicians gone wrong? We sent Phil Airtime out to Berkhamsted to gauge the state of public opinion.

(Sound of clinking glasses and smokers being ejected from The Thug And Lettuce, formerly the Fox And Hounds.)

First Drinker: I've got no time for this election. They all say the same thing. It's so boring.

Second Drinker: Nah, I've got no time for this election. They all say the same thing. It's so boring.

Airtime: So there we have it. The voters are sending a clear message to the politicians of every party. They've got no time for the election. They feel that politicians all say the same thing. And they're bored.

Naughtie: Thank you, Phil Airtime. Listening to that with me in the studio is the doyen of pollsters, Mori Wooster. Professor, you've heard the evidence that people are fed up with the election even before it's started, and, frankly, they're bored. What do your polls tell you about the boredom factor as we run up to the election?

Wooster: I listened to your fascinating package, Jim, and I can tell that it very much bears out the trends we've been observing in our surveys. As recently as last November, for instance, only 84 percent of the electorate said that they were bored. Whereas today that figure has risen to 103 percent. But the really significant finding is that the greatest swing on the boredom index is that of women in the crucial 45-55 constituency.

Naughtie: Professor, that's really fascinating. So what you're saying is "Look, as recently as last November, only 84 percent of voters were prepared to say that they were bored with politics, but today that figure has risen to an astonishing 103 percent, with middle-aged women as the swing constituency".

Wooster: That would be our position, most definitely.

Naughtie: So, to sum up, Professor, would you agree that, on balance, people are becoming more rather than less bored?

Wooster: I couldn't have put it better myself. But I think we have to go back to 1953 to get a...

Naughtie: I'm sorry – that's all we've got time for, Professor. We've got to go over to our panel of politicians, who are waiting in our Westminster studio, for their reaction to this devastating boredom poll.

Opek Lemsip, you're the Lib Dem spokesman for Extra-Terrestrial Affairs and Europe. Which do you believe are the key issues which will arouse the greatest amount of boredom in the coming election?

Lemsip: I don't think it's so much a question of particular issues, but more the public's perception that all of us politicians say the same thing all the time. And that's very worrying.

Naughtie: Oliver Nitwit, for the Tories, are you worried?

Nitwit: I'm very worried, Jim, that the people have this perception of politicians, quite mistakenly in my view, that we just say the same thing all the time, and that's got to be worrying.

Naughtie: Kate Windfarm, as a junior minister, do you agree with your opposite numbers?

Windfarm: No, I think the Tories, as usual, have got this completely wrong. I think the message that we're getting from the public is that they perceive that all politicians have a tendency to say the same things all the time. And, unlike Opek, that genuinely makes me worried.

Naughtie: So, let me get this clear. What all of you are saying, in your different ways, is that the people are, frankly, getting pretty bored with politicians, and the major reason for that is that they all say the same thing.

So later in the programme we will be looking in rather more detail at the specific issues which are sending Britain to sleep.

And you can join in here by letting us know your views on which issues are most likely to play a key role in promoting election fatigue. Do you, for instance, think it's Europe? Or is it tuition fees? Or is it the tax-credit system? Or NHS reform? Or all-night drinking? Or is it perhaps just that all politicians tend to say the same things?

You can let us know what you think by email to todayprogramme@boringissues.bbc.co.uk

Meanwhile, Phil Airtime has been listening down there in Berkhamsted, along with some of the regulars of the Thug And Lettuce. Phil, what have they all been making off this discussion we've been having here in the studio?

Airtime: I'm afraid, Jim, they turned it off some time back, because it was so boring. So, back to you, Jim.

Naughtie: Thank you, Phil. And now it's time for Thought For The Day with the Rev. Carole Caplin, of the Church of Aromatherapy.

Caplin: Well, you know, it's all very easy to say that politicians are boring, but *(continued 94 kHz)*

The Conservatives won the general election in 1979 and stayed out of office until 1997.

Life In The United Kingdom, A Journey to Citizenship
Published by the Home Office

News in Brief

TORIES CALL FOR COMPULSORY HISTORY LESSONS

THE CONSERVATIVE Shadow Education Secretary Tim Collins today called for compulsory history lessons for children up to the age of 16.

"The fact is that unless these children are taught history they'll never know what the Tory Party was," Mr Collins told the National Catholic Heads Conference, "or the fact that it was once a political party that governed Britain."

However, many schools rejected the Conservative proposals, saying that such ancient history is of no relevance to children's lives today.

PROSTITUTION TO BE LEGALISED

LIVERPOOL City Council has announced plans to open the country's first official red light district.

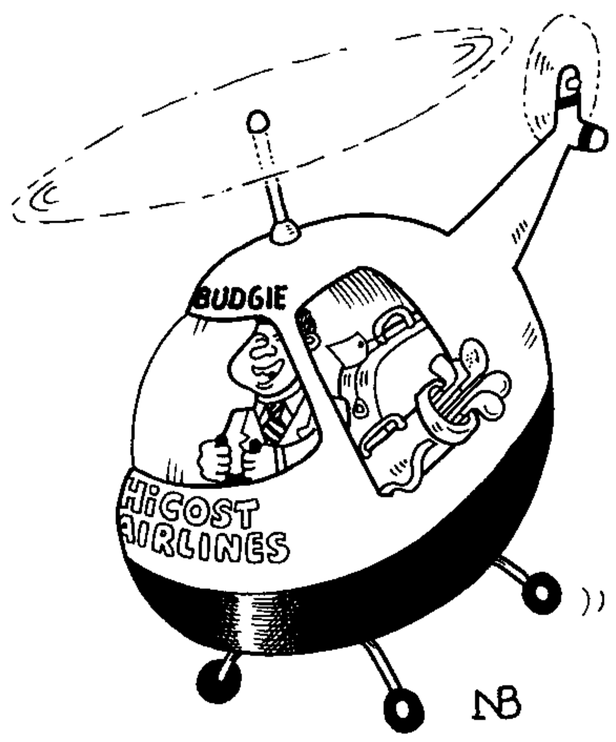
"Men soliciting for sex will now have to apply directly to the council's new Sexual Services Department and, providing there's no hold-up with processing their paperwork, they should receive their designated sexual services within 21 days of lodging their application," said council leader *(cont. p. 94)*

CRIME FIGURES SENSATION

NEW FIGURES have revealed that in a self-reporting survey, 25 per cent of British boys aged between 14 and 17 claimed to be criminals, committing offences ranging from fare-dodging to assault to drug-dealing.

"The other three-quarters claimed to be Formula One racing drivers, professional footballers or Brad Pitt," said a Home Office *(cont. p. 94)*

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



The grand young Duke of York,
He wouldn't go by train.
He flew up North for a round of golf,
And he flew back down again.

Advertisement

I BELIEVE THAT BRITAIN CAN ONLY TAKE A LIMITED NUMBER OF VAMPIRES EACH YEAR.

WE ARE A SMALL ISLAND. OUR BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICES ARE ALREADY OVERSTRETCHED AND OUR GRAVEYARDS ARE FULL TO BURSTING WITH EARTH-LINED COFFINS.

NO ONE CAN ACCUSE ME OF VAMPIRISM. I MYSELF AM A VAMPIRE AND THE DRACULAS CAME TO THIS COUNTRY FROM TRANSYLVANIA, AND WERE WELCOMED BY THE BRITISH PEOPLE WITH OPEN NECKS.

BUT NOW THE TIME HAS COME TO DEFEND OUR SHORES WITH LINES OF GARLIC AND CRUCIFIXES.

VOTE CONSERVATIVE

Michael Howard

TOP TORY ADVISER STUNS PARTY

by Our Political Staff **Max Hustings**

A SENIOR Conservative election manager, the Australian expert Mr Bruce Blimey, stunned observers last night with a unique insight into the current political situation.

He announced to shocked campaigners that he thought the Conservative Party would not win the next election.

As seasoned party workers fainted with surprise, Mr Blimey continued, "Not only do I believe that Michael Howard will lose the next election, but my analysis also suggests that the Pope will remain a Catholic and that bears will continue to prefer woodland for the purposes of defecation".

KILROY-SILK IN NEW SPLIT

by Our Political Staff **Simon Hefferlump**

THE political world was not rocked in any way at all last night by the news that the former UKIP MEP and leader of the exciting new one-man party Veritablearse is to split from himself.

Said Mr Kilroy: "I have had enough of this perma-tanned publicity-crazed megalomaniac Mr Silk. From now on we are going our separate ways. I am going to be the sole leader of myself and Silk can do what he likes."

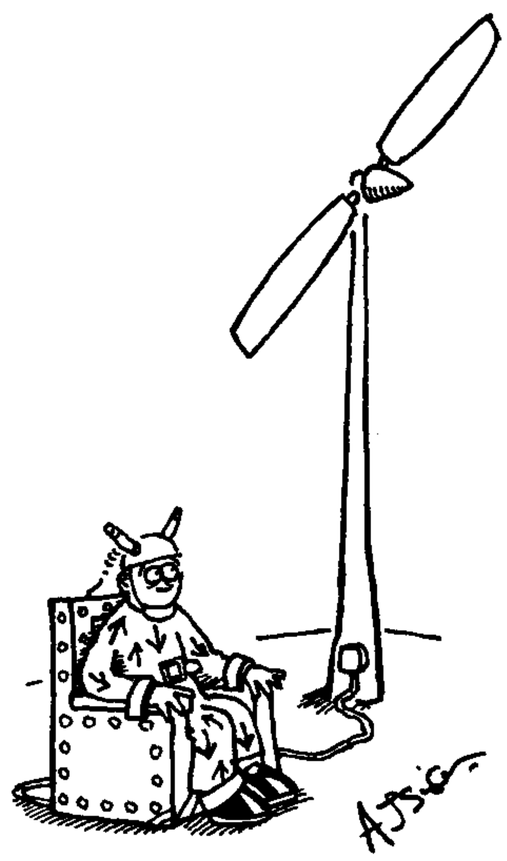
Said Mr Silk: "I am delighted to be shot of Kilroy at last. He has been nothing but an embarrassment to me for 20 years, with his ridiculous tan and his absurd obsession with appearing on television. I am resigning from him, to spend more time with my sunbed."

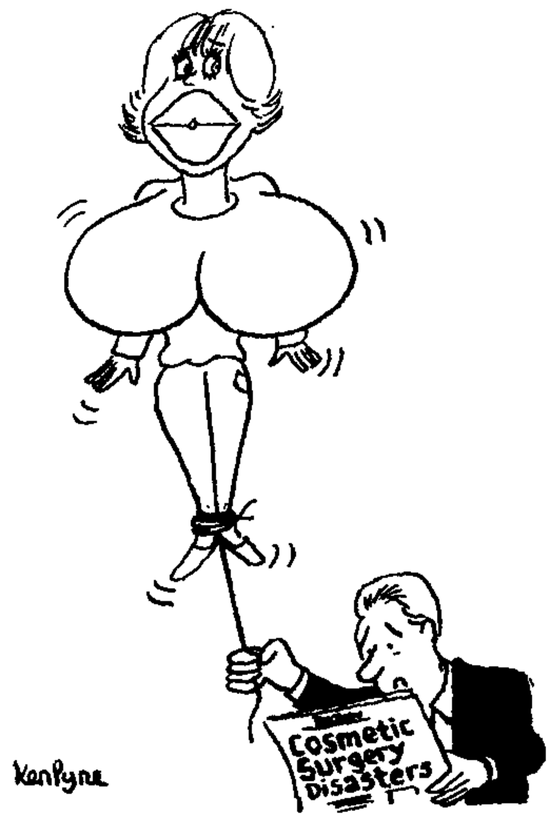
A Minicab Driver writes

Every week a well-known unlicensed taxi driver comments on an issue of topical importance.

THIS WEEK: **Iqbal Sacranie** (no licence-plate number or insurance etc) on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

Blimey guv! I mean I've got nothing against the whole Holocaust business and it was you know very sad what happened but I think it's important to remember that they are not the only people we should be remembering. I mean there's the Rwandans, the Kosovans, the Kurds and the Palestinians which let's face it has got to be the worst of the lot and who's responsible for that? It's the Jews innit? No wonder they got into all that trouble. You know what I'd do with them *(contd. p. 94)*





THIS WEEK'S BESTSELLERS

1. **The Da Vinci Code** by Dan Brown (1)
2. **Decoding The Da Vinci Code** by D. Code (2)
3. **The Da Vinci Cookbook** by D. Frost (10)
4. **Backpackers Guide To The Da Vinci Code** (3)
5. **The Da Vinci Code Diet** by Dee Eyett (6)
6. **The Lovers' Guide To The Da Vinci Code** by Dr Alex Codefort (4)
7. **The Little Book Of The Da Vinci Code** (7)
8. **Eat, Shoots and Codes** by Dave Inchy (5)
9. **Harry Potter And The Da Vinci Code** by Dan Rowlinginit (8)
10. **Schott's Da Vinci Miscellany** by Dan Schott (9)

(That's enough Da Vinci books. Ed)

Recipe of the Day
with Celebrity Chef MARCO PIERRE WHITE

Battered Wife

Take one wife. Beat well.
Add police to mixture.
Pop into cell overnight to cool down.
Dish up on front pages.

Tomorrow: Fuck à l'orange.

"Wake up! Wake up! it's time to start drinking again!"

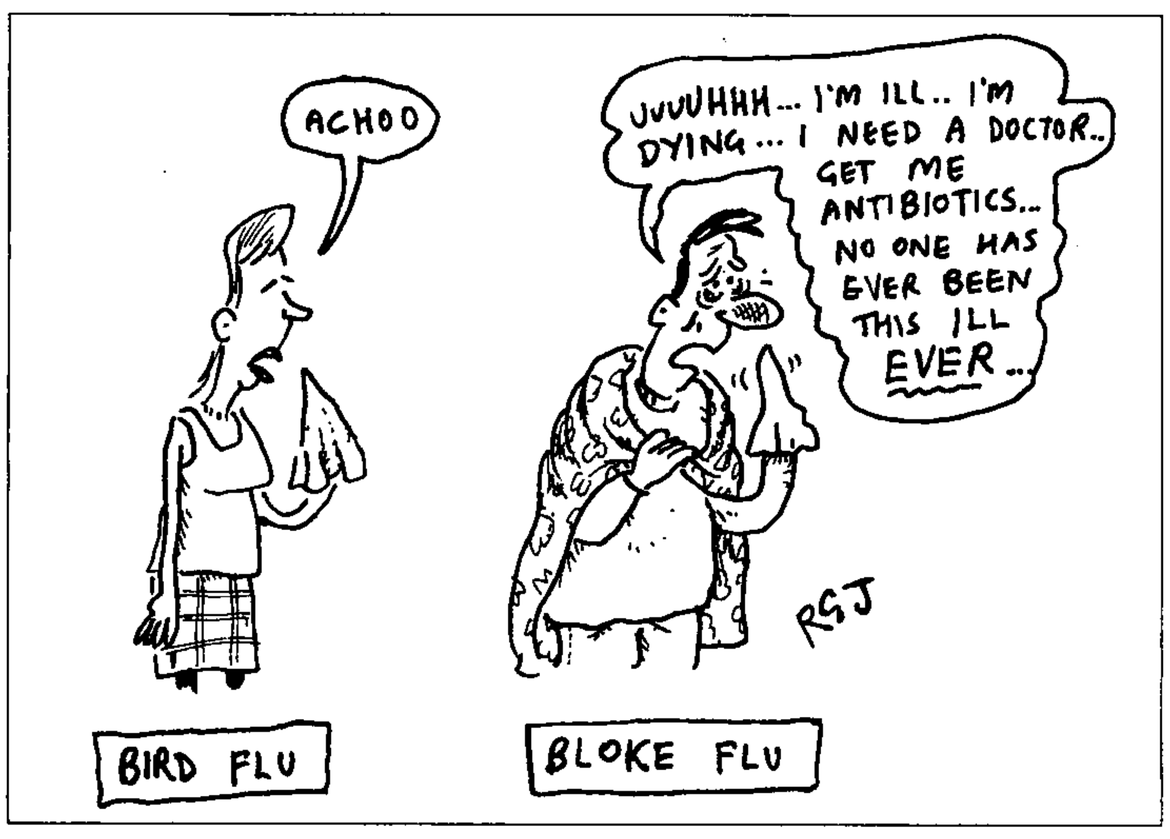
A Personal Apology By The Sunday Telegraph To The Archbishop Of Canterbury

As the editor of the Sunday Telegraph, I would like to offer my profound apologies to the Archbishop of Canterbury for our recent front-page world exclusive under the headline 'Archbishop No Longer Believes In God Shock'.

I would like to make it clear that I was on holiday at the time and that this unforgiveable and shoddy piece of fifth-rate journalism was solely the responsibility of my incompetent deputy, Mr Matthew D'Arshola, about whom, frankly, I have always had my doubts.

I can assure the Archbishop that Mr D'Arsehola will pay the ultimate price for this insanely irresponsible blunder – ie, he will remain as my deputy, so that I can continue to shout at him all day and every day, except of course when I am on holiday, which I was, as I have already said.

D. Lawson, Supreme Editor of the Sunday Telegraph, Canary Wharf, London, Europe, The World, The Universe.



The Sabbath Times

January 26 1943 BC

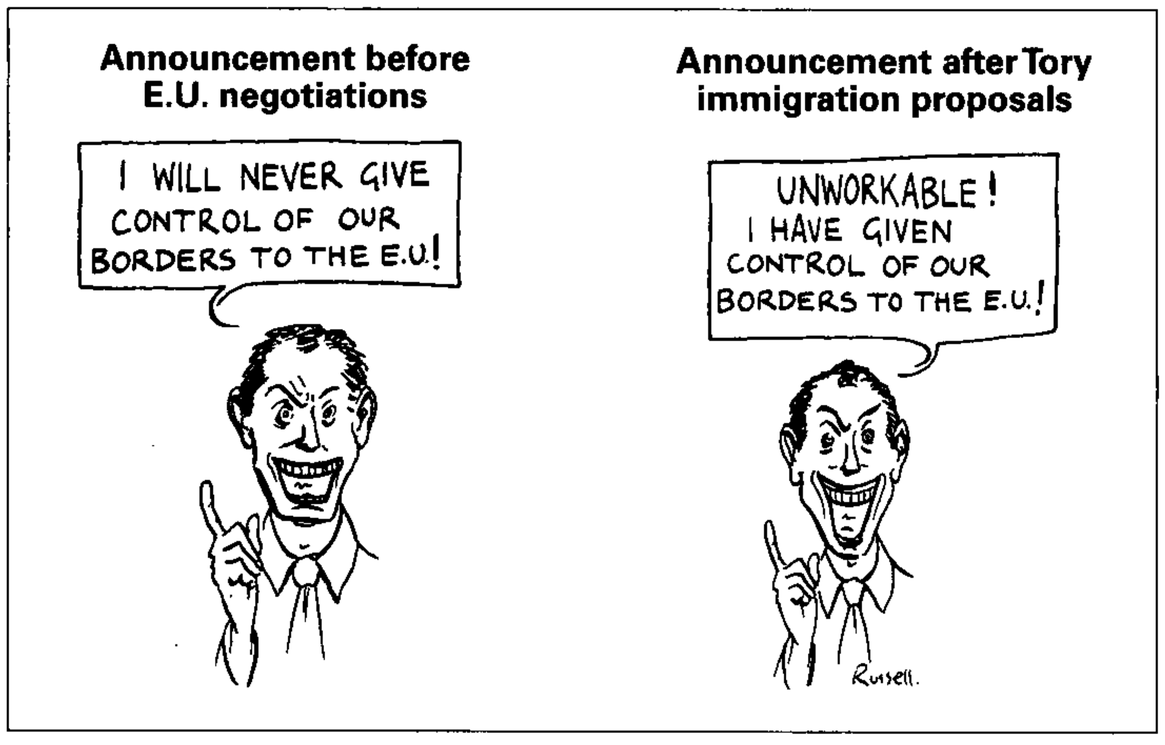
All-Day Drinking To Go Ahead

POLITICIANS have sought to play down fears expressed by some religious leaders that plans to allow 24-hour drinking in pubs and clubs in Sodom and Gomorrah will lead to a moral decline amongst the local citizens.

"All our research tells us that far from creating no-go zones, relaxing the licensing laws will actually lead to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah drinking in a more moderate and responsible way," insisted the leader of the twinned cities' council. "Wild claims that this will lead to drunken orgies in the street and vile debauchery the like of which the world has never seen before are nothing but pathetic scare stories.

"We're confident that Sodom and Gomorrah will remain the same quiet, peaceful cities after 24-hour drinking comes into force from this November."

However, local shepherd, Lot, attacked the proposals, saying, "With so much debauchery in the cities, these new measures are just rubbing salt into the wounds."


Announcement before E.U. negotiations
I WILL NEVER GIVE CONTROL OF OUR BORDERS TO THE E.U!
Announcement after Tory immigration proposals
UNWORKABLE! I HAVE GIVEN CONTROL OF OUR BORDERS TO THE E.U!
Russell.

Daily Mail

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2005

HAS THE DAILY MAIL BEEN INJECTED WITH BOLOX?

By **PHIL SPACE**

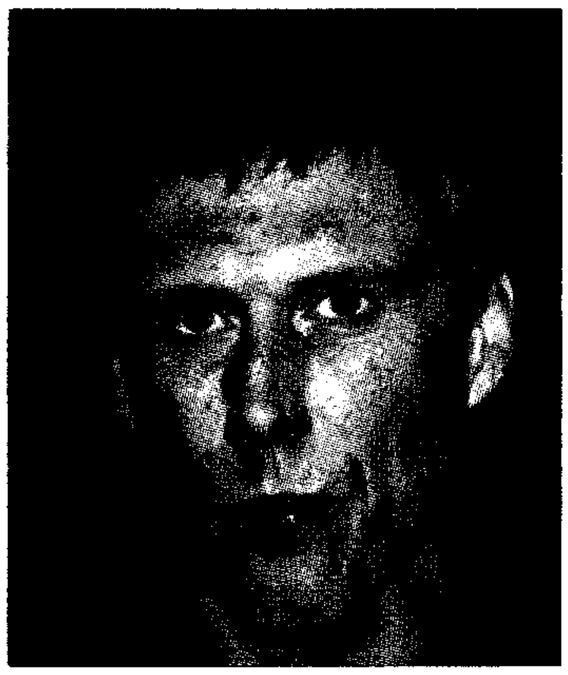
FRIENDS of the Daily Mail are insisting that the ageing newspaper has had a course of Bolox injections in a desperate attempt to stay looking young.

Bolox is made from a powerful poison which paralyses the brain – thus making it perfect for use in the Daily Mail.

Say friends, "The signs are all there. If you look at the piece about Princess Michael of Kent or you examine the article about Kylie Minogue it is absolutely clear that the paper is full of Bolox".

THE MAIL: Filling in with Bolox

DIARY



BEZ

Me, I'm King of the Jungle shit, me. Well, not like King of the Jungle shit, more like King of the Celebrity Big Thing, y'know, like, Thingy Big Celebrity, worever. Oh fock man, y'know what I mean. That programme. I wonned it, man. An' no-one can tell me I din't, not no-one. You tellin' me I din't, are you? You tellin me I lak lost it, eh? 'Cos if you are, you're in seriously stinkin' deep shit, man. I'm the Numero One-oh. Yeah! And it's fockin' doin' my head in, man.

So I get out the 'ouse, next thing is lak I'm on Richard and Judy.

Richard's the bloke, that's how you remember which is which.

"Ow's it feel to've won, then?" sez Richard, who's the geezer.

"Won lak wha?" I sez. Wha's he on about, man?

"Won the Celebrity Big Focker?" sez Richard. "Oh, right," I sez. "Yeah, mate. I remember. Can't catch me out that easy!"

"So what's it like, then?" sez Richard.

"Wha's wha' lak?" I sez. They's always tryin' to catch you out, these lak interviewees. Don't make themsels clear, the fockers. "Winning?!" sez Richard.

"Winnin' wha?" sez I.

"Winning Celebrity Big Focker?!!" sez Richard.

"Oh, that," sez I. "Wha about it?"

"What's it like winning it?"

"I won it man! And don't you say I never or I'll clock you one!"

"So what's it like winning it?"

"Winnin' wha?"

Went on lak tha' for hours, we did. Round and round in worever. Call isself an interviewee, that Richard geezer? Thas no' wha' I'd call 'im, no way. More lak a shit interviewee, 'im. Couldn't mek isself clear, and wha' good's it bein' an interviewee if ye can't mek yiself clear? Richard and Judy? Don't-know-shit and Judy, more like.

Life ain't for sittin' in a dingy dosshole with your head too far up your own arse to see the people around you. That's my philosophy, and that's exactly what I told Sir Dave Frost on his programme on Sunday fockin' mornin', man.

"Top of the mornin' to ye', Bez!" he sez, all smarmy, lak rubbin' his hands an' that. What's he on about? Lak I could give a toss. So then Dave asks me to review the Sunday papers. Do the wha? I ask. I felt lak sayin' fuck the fuck off, man. But I didn't, 'cos we was on telly, and I mind me language in front of the fockin' kids.

"What've you found for us in the Sunday papers today, then, Bez?" he sez.

"News, mainly," I sez.

"Any news in like particularing?" sez Dave, all snooty and "A'm a fockin' Sir me" lak.

"Nope, Dave. Just news. Pages and pages of the fockin' stuff. And it's doin' my head in, man."

So he's, lak, turnin' to the other geezer mongin' on the couch, only it's not lak a geezer, it's this old bird with big knockers, and he's lak, "So did you come across anyfink lak interestin' an' that in the Sunday papers, Eve?"

And this Eve pushes her boobs out and rattles on about the grim or worever news from abroad an' that. Lak do I look as if I care there's a fockin war or whatever in Iraq, man?

Meantimes, I'm, lak, this is my fockin' worst nightmare, sittin' on a couch with two old folk gabbin' 'bout the fockin' news from wherever when I could be out trippin' me nuts off, down the clubs an' that. So I interrupt them and I sez, "Look, Dave, you may be a top-shit geezer an' that but I've 'ad it up to fockin 'ere with this shit, lak. No offence, lak, but you can stuff ye focking Sunday papers up your fockin' arse. I'm off, me." And I lak blow off out the studio before that bullshit does me 'ead in.

I'm lak really really famous now, me, probably the most famous person on the fockin' earth or wherever, more famous than the fockin' Queen of England.

Lak, don get me wrong, I got one helluva lorra respect for the Queen, but if she were ever offered Big Brother she wouldn't stand no fockin' chance against me, no way, man, 'cos she's not lak down-to-earth, she's full-a-shit, no offence.

See, lak maybe next series, or some lak all-winners show, they'd put me up against the Queen, but she wouldn't stand no fockin' chance, mate. She'd come into the 'ouse *with* her nose all up 'er own arse and feelin' all high 'n' mighty, lak she were the cat's piss, thinkin' to hersel', lak, I'm so fockin' royal and respected by all my fockin' subjects I'll walk off with this fockin' title, no sweat.

So there she's sat, the Queen, in all her fockin' finery, all smug an' that, with that smile of hers, wavin' away, when I come through the fockin' door, all down-to-earth and natural, lak.

First up, she's fockin' laughin' to hersel', thinkin' 'oo the fock's this little wanker trippin' 'is nuts off, no way's 'e gonna take me on, lak, I'm the fockin' Queen and he's fockin' lower than the fockin' lowest. But then I challenge 'er to a lak challenge, and the smile's wiped off her fockin' face.

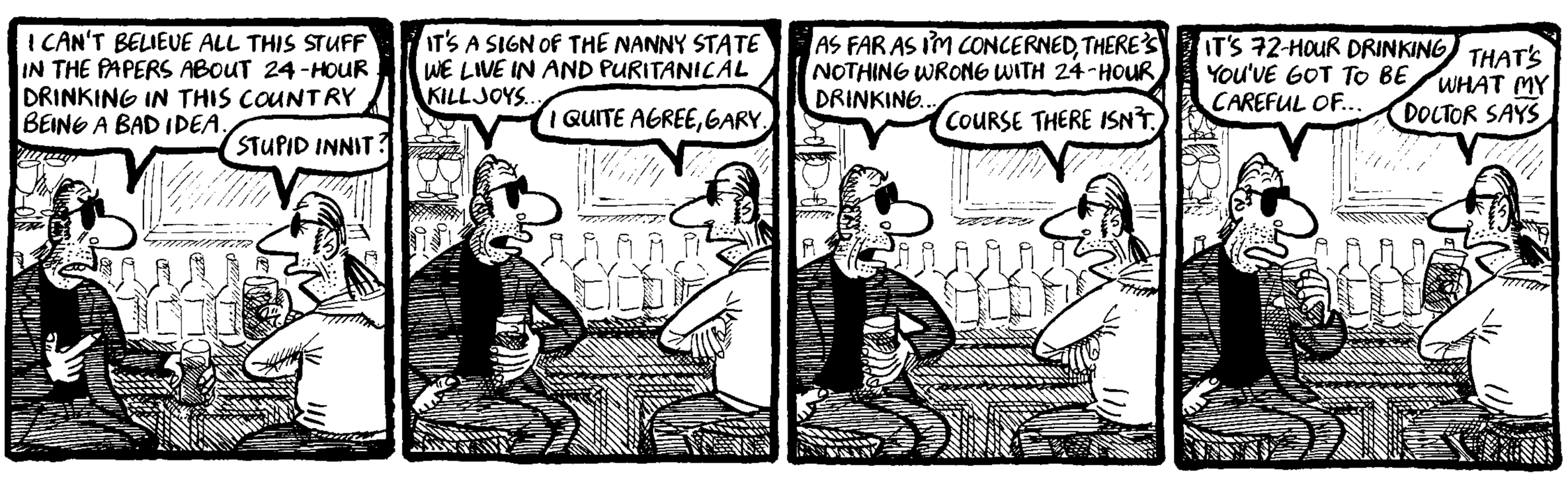
"I'll take you on in a vodka challenge!" I sez. "Queen or not, I can beat you, no shit. I can drink two bottles a night, no pressure, by which time you'll be pukin' up all over yer fockin' 'orse 'n' cart." So we're up all night drinkin', me and the Queen, swayin' an' singin' an' bodgin' in the jacuzzi and that, like a couple of fuckin' arses, and she's drenched in sweat and her heart's turnin' somersaults, and when she's called to the diary room she's so fockin' rat-arsed and boozed out of 'er 'ead she goes no way and tells Big Brother just to shut the fock up, then what does she do she only fockin' strips off and does a runner over the wall, and whadya know she's fockin' disqualified, man, in't she? So lak, Bez is once again voted all-time Big Brother champion of all time. Down to earth, man. Thas wor I am, and they respect me for it, no shit.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I CAN'T BELIEVE ALL THIS STUFF IN THE PAPERS ABOUT 24-HOUR DRINKING IN THIS COUNTRY BEING A BAD IDEA.
STUPID INNIT?
IT'S A SIGN OF THE NANNY STATE WE LIVE IN AND PURITANICAL KILLJOYS...
I QUITE AGREE, GARY.
AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH 24-HOUR DRINKING...
COURSE THERE ISN'T.
IT'S 72-HOUR DRINKING YOU'VE GOT TO BE CAREFUL OF...
THAT'S WHAT MY DOCTOR SAYS

Literary Review

Baxter's soup

Saturday

Ian McEwan

(Cape £17.99)

FIFTEEN or so years ago critics used routinely to complain that the English novel had become fundamentally detached from the landscapes it purported to reflect. Here we were, various angry young persons would insist, in a universe made fragile by ayatollahs, collapsing walls and Mrs Thatcher, and there were Kingers, Mags and Co still lobbing in their elegant despatches from the Hampstead front line. A decade and a half later, this kind of claim would be more or less unfileable. In fact the modern English novel fairly hums with informed reflections on the state we're in and the fate of right-thinking, liberal-minded people in an ever more uncertain world.

Saturday, the expensively priced follow-up (18 quid for 280 pages) to Ian McEwan's rapturously received *Atonement*, has these characteristics *in excelsis*.

Set on a single day in February 2003 dominated by an anti-war protest, it features an amiable late-fortysomething named Henry Perowne, whose life, arranged around his challenging career as a neurosurgeon, loving media lawyer wife and hugely talented progeny, looks pretty damn perfect. In a 24-hour period calculated to emphasize the randomness of our tiny, trumpery lives here beneath the brooding skies of a mighty cosmos, we see Henry staring from his bedroom window in Fitzroy Square (*chez* McEwan, by the way) at a stricken aeroplane, scraping his Merc against the BMW of a venomous piece of lowlife named Baxter, beating his anaesthetist at squash, visiting his decaying mother in her old people's home and returning to cook for the family dinner that, it is hoped, will reconcile daughter Daisy with her distinguished poet grandpa, John Grammaticus.

The dinner is radically undermined by the re-entry into Perowne's life of a knife-wielding and vengeful Baxter. And yet what distinguishes the novel, what defines it as an absolutely pattern modern fictional artefact, is the huge weight of research pressing down on the shoulders of its cast. With Henry and his professional calling, McEwan has some faint excuse for the delighted references to trans-sphenoidal hypophysectomies and the gleeful surgical out-takes ("The astrocytoma was well defined and had only partially infiltrated surrounding tissues", etc) or even for Perowne's stagey habit of instantly diagnosing the afflictions of people he sees in the street: the druggy girl glimpsed across the square has "amphetamine-driven formication" or "an exogenous opoid-induced histamine reaction", while the menacing Baxter is swiftly marked down as a potential goner from Huntingdon's Disease.

At the same time this dogged determination to get all one's material direct from the horse's mouth, so to speak, extends to practically everyone else in the book. Perowne junior turns out to be a promising blues guitarist, which is the cue for a riot of recherché detail about Art Wood (Ronnie's purist elder brother), the Eel Pie Club at the Cabbage Patch pub in Twickenham, Blues Incorporated and "the sudden chop of an augmented chord, a note held against the tide of harmony, a judiciously flattened fifth, a seventh bent in sensuous microtones".

Even Grammaticus's poetic disappointments – Raine got the editorship at Faber, Fenton the Oxford chair – are so minutely tabulated that the reader who doesn't know that these eminences are McEwan's chums might assume that back numbers of the *Author* recently joined the piles of *Blues Guitarist* and *The Journal of Neurosurgery* on the Fitzroy Square recycling pile.

Nowhere is *Saturday* more archetypal, though, than in its relationship, or non-relationship, with God. The human deity status of Perowne's calling is an ever present. He watches the human traffic of the square "with the remote possessiveness of a god". There are inevitable references to Darwin, whose life he has been reading about, while the whole scientific background is dutifully Dawkinsesque in its proud and resolute rationalism. Curious, then, that the only genuinely omniscient presence in the book is the author, McEwan being one of those writers who have to explain everything all the time, has to account for the basis of motivation ("the assertiveness is misleading, more style than character") rather than coming to it by intuition, and gamely interferes and stage-manages with all the vigour of Sir Peter Hall directing *Hamlet*.

In the final scene Perowne,w having pushed Baxter near-fatally down the stairs, ends up saving his life in the operating theatre. No problem about this neat coincidence: figurative novels have figurative finales – that's how they work. On the other hand, the reader staggers away with an abiding impression of people who grew out of the research that McEwan undertook to establish their professional *bona fides* rather than possessing independent lives of their own. From the vantage point of the cosmos, this is a novel about humanism. But it is also, without ever quite acknowledging the fact, a novel about some of humanism's limitations.

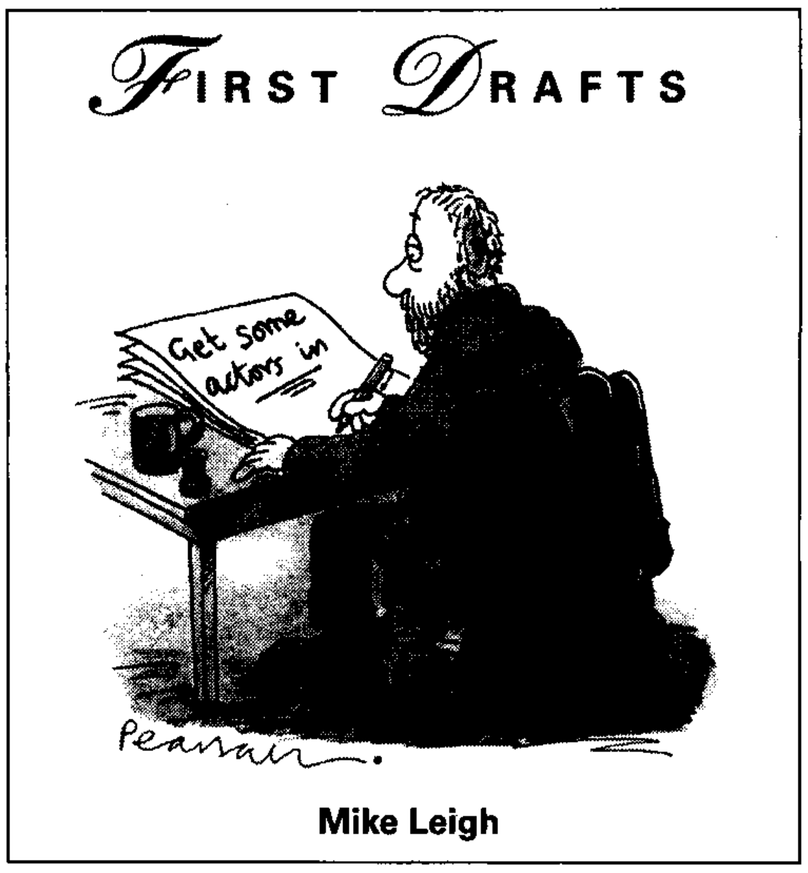
LIBRARY NEWS

■ THE biggest public library in Wales is to up sticks and move out of its popular, purpose-built and relatively new building to make way for a new shopping centre even though work on its new home hasn't started yet.

Cardiff central library is currently housed in a three-storey building, completed just 16 years ago. But the library is in the way of the £350m "St David's 2" shopping centre planned by Land Securities and Capital Shopping Centres plc, which is due to start building later this year.

Cardiff council made an emergency decision to clear out of the library after the developers threatened to delay the start of the project until 2008. The city's ice rink will also be booted out of the city centre (once the ice hockey season is over) to make way for the shops, with the council pledging to "work towards" a new rink at the out-of-town International Sports Village development.

Library bosses will have to find a temporary home for the library's 500,000-item collection. Wherever it goes, it is likely to have to stay for the next two years. Another "iconic new library" will then be built, promises the council, largely at public expense.



BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE identity of the third party behind the sudden withdrawal from sale of Mick Wall's ambulance-chasing, cut-and-paste book about the late John Peel is so far shrouded in mystery.

But some things are certain. One is that the complainant is not Noel Edmonds, as has been suggested in some quarters: both Orion and Edmonds' office have scotched the rumour.

Another is that the book might still have been on sale had it not been published with such indecent haste. To get a book to market within a month, certain corners must have been cut, not least of them being the quality of the basic research and the chance for a proper legal reading.

Another certainty is that the complainant shut the stable door after the horse had achieved a respectable placing in the Christmas sales steeplechase. Orion received notice from the wronged party's lawyer on 23 December, and so many shops still had the book for sale on Christmas Eve, by which time the publisher had probably sold as many copies as it was ever going to. An amended paperback will be published in the future, probably just before Transworld publishes its official Peel book.

'Bookworm'

THE NEOPHILIACS

"January is the new August." — *Sunday Times*.

"January is the new Lent." — *New Statesman*.

"Streets are the new roads." — Job ad from Southwark Council, *Observer*.

"Anal sex is the new oral sex." — *Sunday Times*.

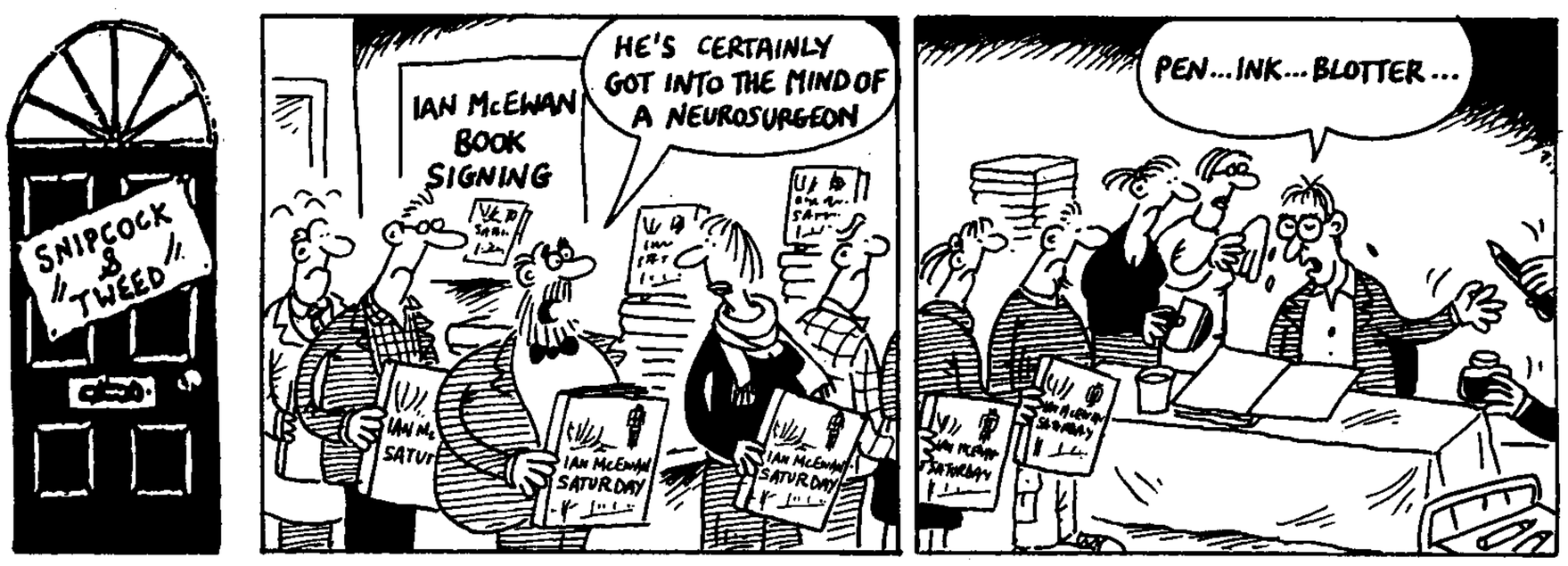
"Painting is the new taxidermy." — *Daily Telegraph*.

"Pomegranates: they're the new figs." — *Guardian*.

"Cardiff: it's the new Prague." — *Western Daily Press*.

"Is India the new China?" — *Guardian*.

"Is porridge the new sushi?" — *Times*.


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IAN McEWAN BOOK SIGNING
HE'S CERTAINLY GOT INTO THE MIND OF A NEUROSURGEON
IAN McEWAN SATURDAY
PEN...INK...BLOTTER...

Risible sun

Wrong about Japan

Peter Carey

(Faber, £12.99)

Kafka on the Shore

Haruki Murakami

(Harvill, £12.99)

WRITER visits foreign country and reports back that things there are not quite as he had imagined them to be. Sounds familiar?

In *Wrong About Japan* Peter Carey attempts to put a new spin on this hackneyed approach by travelling with his 12-year-old son, a Manga comic aficionado whose lack of interest in temples, tea ceremonies and all that sword 'n' samurai guff offers a potentially refreshing counterpoint to Carey's own quest for what he imagines is the Real Japan. In fact, both are looking for a cartoon Japan that simply doesn't exist: the father's is drawn from ancient Hiroshige woodcuts, the son's from futuristic comic-strips. Neither is right but in a sense, despite the look-at-me title, neither is wrong.

Carey confesses early on that he has in fact been to Japan a couple of times already, so all his wide-eyed amazement at its difference from what he expected doesn't quite wash. The low-tech hotel (mats on the floor to sleep on) with its high-tech bathroom (an automatic loo that can wash your bottom), the confusing signs in funny writing, the fake plastic food in restaurant windows, and the weird kitschy fashions worn with paralysing sincerity by teenagers (such as his son's e-penpal Takashi) are duly paraded for our benefit. To inject a bit of narrative incident they forget their map, get lost and wander into a seedy corner of the "floating world" or red-light district, where a friendly yakuza gangster in a geisha bar recommends the tastiest snacks prepared by a sushi chef who looks like a sumo wrestler.

But although he describes himself as "hopelessly romantic", regrets his "shameful ignorance" and declares that "things take on an air of great inscrutability" in Japan, Carey is not just a travel hack spouting clichés. He's also a world-famous prize-winning novelist, so he can get his agent and translator to arrange high-level interviews with manga artists and directors of "anime" (the film version) to indulge his son's cultural obsessions, and with tenth-generation swordsmiths and war veterans to indulge his own.

Carey notes that "Everybody in Japan read manga, except those just born or about to die" and decides that some of it is actually rather good. (Presumably he is not thinking of the s&m porn comics read by suited salarymen on the subway train.) The animated versions are much better than the "flat, cute world of Disney", though he notes (without of course being in the slightest bit patronising) that their Tokyo taxi driver wears "Mickey Mouse white gloves".

Later they go to Sega World to play arcade games and check out the cool miniaturized gadgetry in Electric Town. To Carey's son this, not the world of Kabuki theatre and Zen gravel gardens, is the real Japan. He wants to live there. But his dad, playing the deracinated New York intellectual, frets over "echoes of the atomic bomb" and of the way in which "a proud and isolated society had waged war, suffered war, emerged from war". Yet when a film director explains that "being able to fight in a war is an expression of one's citizenship" Carey throws up his hands and declares "This was getting way too Japanese for me."

You begin to share the son's embarrassment and boredom, as he skulks in the corner texting his friend Takashi (who, disappointingly, works in an Americanised fast food joint called Mister Donut).

No myths are exploded in Haruki Murakami's new novel, either, though some are worked into the narrative. The Oedipus myth, the prophesies of Cassandra, and Biblical plagues of raining fish and leeches all make their appearance in what the blurb describes as the "Odysseys" of its two main protagonists, a batty old man and a runaway teenager.

Their parallel but apparently unrelated quests are prompted or defined by the pop song of the title, "Kafka on the Beach". The old man lost his memory in a mysterious incident during World War II but he can talk to cats and dogs. The boy is motivated by a prophesy that he will kill his father, from whom he has run away, and sleep with his (long lost) mother and sister, for whom he is searching.

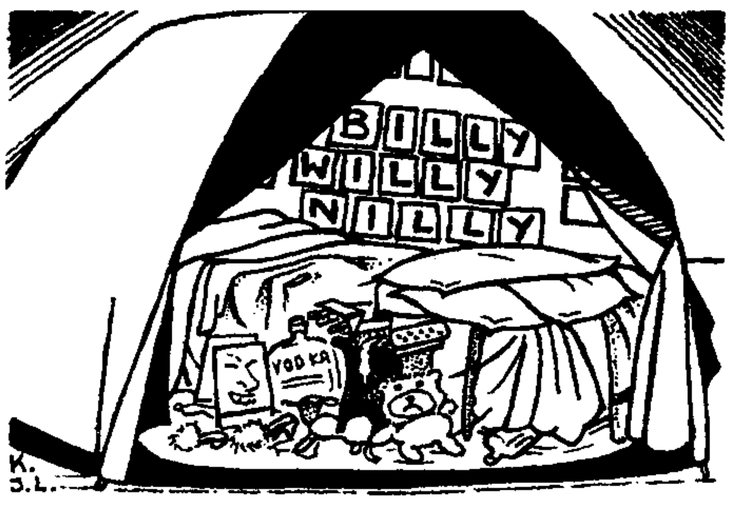
"I'm the only Gray in the village"

Murakami is probably the best known living Japanese novelist, yet his writing, with its blend of shaggy dog and magic realism, has a curiously anodyne, culturally blended and therefore un-Japanese quality. He is a cult writer whose books are full of (mainly western) cultural references, and therefore hip and cool, and so not expected to have a proper story or anything like that. A previous novel adopted the iconic title *Norwegian Wood*. Here, in addition to those classical myths, and the Czech surrealist of the title, he manages to work in references to Duke Ellington, Cream, the Arabian Nights, Adolf Eichmann, Prince, Indiana Jones, Beethoven's Archduke Trio, Hansel and Gretel, Chekhov and, er, Mickey Mouse.

Though it starts off relatively low-key, it gets progressively more whacky and weird as it rambles on. As well as a cat that talks about opera there's a tart who talks philosophy, quoting Bergson and Hegel as she services her lorry driver client. Someone else has sex with a ghost. It seems everyone is looking for their lost soul, or lover, or some missing part of their being. Every encounter along the way is an excuse for a rambling explanation or story. But take a step back and ask: what does it all mean? The answer is, not a lot.

There are moments when a library becomes itself. The rest of the time is potential. The book collection, arranged by subject and author, latent with pleasures and instruction, is a library in Clark Kent mode. The crux where the book, the reader and the need collide like particles in an accelerator is its apotheosis, the library as Superword.

TOM STOPPARD extols the London Library,
Weekend Telegraph



Most people don't do something seminal. I've done it twice: with my tent and my bed – Picasso did it with Cubism.

TRACY EMIN
Desert Island Discs, Radio Four

Our local hunt met yesterday, as it always does at this time, on the site of the Battle of Hastings. This year, the crowd of supporters was so great that traffic stopped altogether and horses and hounds had to cram against the gates of the abbey to make room. A few yards away, on the frosty ground, is the site where Harold fell, shot through the eye, and our nation was born. If a new Bayeux tapestry were now being weaved...[continues]

CHARLES MOORE
Daily Telegraph

Pseuds Corner

I would say I was driving at around two or three miles an hour. I was listening to my daughter who was reading poetry to me because she was due to write an essay about Browning.

He is one of her favourite poets and I admire him greatly.

From the transcript of ESTHER RANTZEN's court appearance for traffic offences, *Daily Mail*

A friend told me about this vibrator in the shape of a tree with a snake wrapped round it that made you burst into tears when you had an orgasm. I did not believe it but I bought one and it worked.

SAM RODDICK discusses her 'ethical erotica' business,
Guardian

Pseuds Corporate

A pre-awareness signage trail advising motorists of the reduced capacity and alternative car-parks has been installed. This is targeted to inform drivers at an early stage of their entry to the airport road system to allow them to manoeuvre to use the larger capacity Car Park 1 in the first instance.

From the BAA website

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

MANUFACTURING

We are pleased to announce that our Chargehands are now renamed:

TEAM LEADERS

The change of title reflects the fact that we are driving to achieve "world class manufacturing" status, rather than sticking with a very medieval form of hierarchy.

It demonstrates that "team ownership" of goals within Lyons Seafoods operations is an essential element of this drive.

It also reflects the ongoing Development of all staff in manufacturing providing us the tools [sic] to improve our effectiveness thereby contributing to the success of the business.

Internal memorandum, Lyons Seafoods

CONTRIBUTORS: J. James, John Robbins, Calum Law, Dr Elizabeth Hall, John Philibert, Michael Pacione, William Forbes-Cable.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

PADDINGTON BASIN

GRUMBLING APPENDIX

THE spiralling costs of the Paddington Health Campus (PHC) will pass the £1bn mark after the owners of land needed for the giant new hospital realised they have the NHS trusts over a barrel and their most outrageous demands will have to be met if the scheme is to go ahead.

These demands include a "forward" property deal on the Royal Brompton Hospital site in Chelsea *and* that the health service should do the developer's work in getting planning permissions for the most possible housing there. A secret report obtained by the *Eye* describes the deal as "clearly not attractive" but says that without the land the whole scheme would have to be abandoned.

The PHC is intended to bring St Mary's Hospital, the specialist Harefield Hospital in Middlesex, the Royal Brompton Hospital in Chelsea and Imperial College's National Heart and Lung Institute together on one central London site at the Paddington Basin regeneration scheme. The building work is to be done through a private finance scheme.

As reported in *Eye* 1098, the projected cost of the mega-merger had already rocketed from £360m to £827m by last summer; but the site was still too small. The latest solution to the land shortage makes £827m look like a bargain as it comes in at just over £1bn (including inflation and VAT). With the land owners seeking commercial close by the end of February, the whole thing is being rushed through with indecent haste behind closed doors – with the hospitals committing themselves to spending millions before outline planning permission is even granted.

A new outline business case for the scheme was published in December. However, "Appendix 14: Property Strategy and Financial Consequences" was removed from the document and replaced by a note saying the deal was "confidential". When those campaigning against the closure of Harefield Hospital asked to see the appendix they were told that due to the "extremely sensitive stage" of negotiations it was commercially confidential. However, the *Eye* has seen Appendix 14, which details the property deal.

A deal with Westminster council to buy up the site of Westminster Community School will be at market price – currently £62.75m. But that sum pales into insignificance beside the land deal with Paddington Development Corporation Ltd (PDCL), which was planning to build housing on the land it owns in the basin. PDCL is a special purpose vehicle whose shareholders include Multiplex and the Reuben Brothers.

PHC will pay £99m up front for the 1.3 hectares of land owned by PDCL on the north side of the Paddington site. "PDCL is aware that Trust's best option is to develop on land currently owned by PDCL and is attaching a premium reflecting the scarcity value of its land to PHC," says the secret appendix, later noting that "this [represents] a premium to PDCL above market value, which has been assessed… to be in the order of £62.5m".

However, the purchase of the site is only the beginning of a complicated land swapping joint venture deal which could prove costly. A forward purchase deal will see PDCL buy the existing St Mary's and Royal Brompton sites, in Paddington and Chelsea respectively, once the hospitals move out in 2013, with prices to be agreed now but with contracts completing in 2013. The agreed base price on St Mary's is £113.5m and that on the Royal Brompton is £135m.

If the two hospital sites have gone up in value by 2013, PHC will have to meet a deferred extra payment of £21.55m out of that rise to PDCL for the extra land it needs in north Paddington. Any increase over and above £21.55m will be split 50-50 between PHC and PDCL rather than all going into the public pocket as it would without the forward deal. Thus if there is a £40m rise in the value of its own land by the time it is actually sold, the NHS will actually see less than £10m benefit from it.

None of this takes into account the amount the NHS land could have raised if it had been put properly on the open market and opened to competition from the many developers who would love to get their hands on prime brownfield land in Chelsea and to the north of Hyde Park.

As if that weren't enough, PHC will also be paying PDCL £9m a year until 2008 in order to keep the site available until the PFI deal is done and it can complete the purchase.

If there's any delay in the deal, the annual payment hikes to £13.65m. And if PHC pulls out of the deal – having finally twigged that the whole idea is a terrible one – after commercial close, it will have to pay compensation to PDCL "with a possible range of £8m to £25m".

PHC will even be required by the contract to help lobby against affordable housing being built on either of its sites in Paddington and Chelsea – although many of its own employees will be in dire need of it. An estimated £19m in planning costs for the two surplus sites would be "payable by PHC" to help PDCL get the best permissions to further increase the value of its land.

In September *Eye* 1115 reported the national audit office's verdict on how things at PHC had gone so far: "There have been shortcomings in the way the Paddington Health Campus scheme has been run, reflecting changing and inadequate governance arrangements, the absence of agreed affordability envelopes and insufficient funding for the Project Team. Unless each of the above weaknesses is addressed, it is unlikely that the required investment in the NHS in West London will achieve its objectives."

In November 2003 the department of health claimed the PHC would have 1,088 NHS in-patient beds – an increase of 80 on the number provided by St Mary's, Royal Brompton and Harefield combined. The new business plan now reports that there will be 799 beds. "It might be possible to conclude that the NHS is not achieving best value on the land and property transaction," notes the secret report at one point. At £1bn (and with plenty more time for costs to rise) for fewer beds than before, it certainly might.

Jean Brett, leader of the Heart of Harefield campaign against the development, said: "This is a ransom deal on the land, in which the public purse is raided by bureaucrats in a futile effort to save face."

MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE

Putting the lie into unreliable

WHEN does a renowned villain, liar, drug dealer and addict become a witness of truth? When he is giving testimony to the court of appeal, it seems, and his is the only evidence that upholds a conviction in a notoriously grim double murder.

The appeal court showed it has learned no lessons from previous miscarriage of justice cases which rely on dodgy "cell confessions" when it threw out the appeal of Michael Stone (pictured right), serving life for the murders of Dr Lin Russell and her six-year-old daughter Megan.

There was no forensic evidence linking Stone to the crime (the hair, fibres and prints at the murder scene were *not* his), and his conviction depended entirely upon the "cell confession" testimony of one Damien Daley, a convicted robber and drug addict who was already known to have committed perjury in the case.

Nevertheless Lord Justice Rose and Mr Justices Moses and Walker reasoned that Daley's motive in coming forward – his "repugnance at what had happened to the Russell family" – meant that new evidence showing how he had lied about his drug addiction under oath did not devalue his testimony against Stone.

Oddly enough there was evidence of another "cell confession" that the appeal court judges decided *not* to hear. This was a confession made by Daley himself to other inmates, in which he apparently told them that he had made up all the Stone stuff to help police.

Fellow prisoner Paul Gilheaney had claimed that Daley admitted to him and to two others that his story about Stone's confession was "all bullshit". One of those other prisoners confirmed Gilheaney's story to those representing Stone. But when police went to investigate the claims, the situation changed. In a highly unusual move, Gilheaney was arrested by officers for attempting to pervert the course of justice and was bailed until a date after Stone's scheduled appeal. The other inmate then suddenly changed his story and declined to give a statement to police.

Gilheany, although he had stuck to his account about Daley's admission through four separate interviews, finally decided he no longer wanted to "help" and Stone's lawyers had to ask the appeal judges to subpoena him. This they refused to do, having decided that Gilheaney's evidence could not be relied upon because he had been wrong about the date when he claimed Daley had "confessed".

In fact police established that the four named inmates were not together on the day Gilheaney said that their conversation had been triggered by a TV broadcast. However, they were together on four other days at around the same time – but this did not impress the appeal judges.

While Daley stood to benefit from his cell-confession testimony against Stone (charges of GBH and arson were subsequently dropped against him, although police claimed it was because the evidence collapsed), there was never going to be any potential gain for Gilheaney.

But does the judges' reasoning that Daley's conscience makes him a reliable witness stack up?

The judges decided that Stone's "confession", relayed via drainpipes, was so detailed it had to have come from the killer. In particular, it included material about an identification parade that only Stone could have known about. Yet there was a story in the *Daily Mirror* about an ID parade; and Stone's lawyers maintain Daley said nothing he could not have pieced together over the 48 hours during which time he clearly spoke to numerous people.

The appeal judges also relied on the discovery of a bloodstained bootlace, used to tie up one of

the girls. It was argued that Stone, as a drug addict, used to use bootlaces as a tourniquet. But that ignores the fact that saliva traces on the boot lace (addicts usually hold the lace in their mouth while injecting themselves) were *not* linked to Stone.

In fact the boot lace no more links Stone to the killings than it does another man with mental health problems who was in the area at the time and who had a history of attacking women and children. According to one health worker at his hostel, this man went missing for 24 hours at the time of the killing and returned agitated – and without his shoelaces. Police have ruled him out, however.

Stone is no innocent. He has a string of convictions, including one dating back 23 years for attacking a man with a hammer during a robbery. But in itself does not make him guilty of the Russell murders so many years later.

When the appeal failed Stone's QC, Edward Fitzgerald, asked for the matter to go to the Lords on a point of public interest. The appeal judges refused. Though the Stone family believes "innocence has a way of coming out", in the case of the four men wrongly jailed for the murder of newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater, it took the appeal court 10 years to realise that damning "cell confession" testimony was thoroughly unreliable.

PRISONS

Inquiry scrubbed

ONE of David Blunkett's last acts before resigning as home secretary was to refuse a public inquiry into events at Wormwood Scrubs prison where, for at least eight years, staff subjected inmates to beatings, assaults, death threats and mock hangings.

Writing to lawyers representing many of the prisoners, who were assaulted at the west London jail between 1992 and 1999, Mr Blunkett concluded that while events had been "wholly unacceptable", lessons had been learned and "there would be no useful purpose served by a public inquiry".

Mr Blunkett did agree, however, to release some reports of the internal investigations into the jail. So far the home office has released just one – which serves only to underline why there *should* be a full public inquiry.

Drawn up in 1998 at the height of the troubles, it not only found that abuse was widespread in the jail and not confined to the segregation block, but it identified serious and prolonged management failures that allowed the brutal regime to thrive. Worse, it revealed that even after the problems were drawn to the attention of those who headed the prison service, the abuse was allowed to continue for another year.

One of the more serious incidents was in July 1998 – three months *after* the damning report was sent to Richard Tilt, then in charge of the prison service, and Tony Pearson, director of prison security. It involved an inmate who was beaten on three consecutive days (his teeth were knocked out in the first attack) as a "punishment" for offering a witness statement in support of another inmate who had been subjected to mock executions.

Among a catalogue of failures the report revealed that of 23 investigations into serious allegations of assault made against staff, only three were "completed to a satisfactory standard". The report also highlighted staff's lack of training, and the alienation of the board of visitors, the chaplaincy and other groups who were often prevented from visiting inmates in the segregation block.

It claimed that staff, not managers, were running the block; and it gave the names of eight staff who, it recommended, should be suspended immediately as inmates would not be safe if they remained in their jobs while internal and police investigations went on.

According to the latest parliamentary answers, the home office has paid out at least £1.4m compensation to more than 50 inmates who claimed they were subject to extreme brutality.

Twenty-seven prison officers were eventually charged with attacking inmates. Six were initially jailed but three acquitted on appeal. Most were cleared, but many more, interviewed under caution, were not even charged. No one disputes that the Scrubs has now been turned around. But no one has yet addressed how its violent culture took root and whether it could happen again at another jail.

Daniel Machover, lawyer for many of the inmates, said: "This report showed that they knew, what we had always suspected – that the jail was in complete meltdown – and that those at the highest levels of the service did nothing to stop it. It makes the calls for a public inquiry even more imperative."

TERROR EXTRADITION

Uncle Sham?

THE prospect of house arrest for those in Britain suspected of, but not charged with, terrorist offences may be thoroughly repressive. But it would be a relief for 30-year-old Babar Ahmad from Tooting, south London.

Mr Ahmad has been held at Woodhill prison in Milton Keynes since last July, awaiting extradition to the United States. He faces allegations there of conspiring to help terrorists – even though his "crimes" were supposedly committed in Britain and British police have already arrested, investigated and released Mr Ahmad without charge.

The US attorney maintains that Mr Ahmad, a British-born computer worker at Imperial College, London, is guilty of having conspired to help Islamic terrorists via a website he ran called Azzam.com, which was hosted by an internet service provider in Connecticut.

Mr Ahmad was arrested and held for six days under anti-terror legislation by British police in December 2003. Three family houses were searched but Mr Ahmad was released without charge. Material from these searches features heavily in the US extradition request. But as Mr Ahmad's wife told the *Eye*: "Why have the British authorities taken this so-called evidence to America? Why not charge him here? If you think you've got some evidence on him, show it to us and charge him here."

Mr Ahmad was rearrested on a US warrant last summer shortly after protesting publicly about the injuries he received during his first arrest. The US attorney allegations that Mr Ahmad conspired to "provide material support to terrorists" cannot be challenged by Mr Ahmad because he is being held under David Blunkett's 2003 extradition law. This means the US can ask for a UK citizen's extradition simply by showing official documents alleging a crime. The defendant has no right to ask for the prima facie evidence before extradition.

Azzam.com was an Islamist website that reported on the fight of "mujahideen" in Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya. It attracted little attention in the wider world until it took the side of the Afghan Taliban regime and was widely condemned. It was closed down by its ISP after the Twin Towers attacks. A parting statement published on Azzam.com declared: "We did not condone the attacks of 11 September 2001. We refer to them in the same words of Taliban leader Mola Mohammad Omar, 'Acts of terror'."

Azzam.com's statement also claimed that it had not broken any laws: "We do not accept or pass on donations to any fighters", it said. The fact that British police did not charge Mr Ahmad with any offence suggests they did not find any evidence of money having been collected for terrorism, nor of any terrorist conspiracies.

The US affidavit, however, claims Mr Ahmad had American accomplices. But, as *Private Eye* has established, all the US citizens who were said to have been part of the "conspiracy" have been released without charge.

The US attorney's case appears to be based on a claim that Mr Ahmad raised cash for Islamist fighters through the website. The US affidavit claims there is an email correspondence between Azzam.com and an individual discussing how to fund Chechen warlords. The US extradition request states: "The e-mail account that sent the request, was traced to a residence in Connecticut."

Private Eye also traced the Connecticut emailer, one Syed Maswood, who was questioned by US police and released without charge. He makes an unlikely terrorist accomplice. As a wealthy Bangladeshi American businessman, he has enthusiastically embraced his adopted country, shortening his name to Ed and even donating money to the Republican party in support of George Bush's 2000 election campaign. Maswood has a personal letter of thanks from Bush for accepting an appointment on the Presidential Business Commission.

While Mr Maswood has protested loudly in the US about his treatment, the Connecticut attorney does not claim that he actually passed any money to Azzam.com nor to Mr Ahmad; and his alleged email has not even been produced in evidence for the British court.

Mr Maswood says he cannot specifically remember the email he sent in 2000 and never contacted any armed groups, although he was concerned about Muslims in Bosnia and Chechnya in 2000. He told the Connecticut Attorney that "You should ask for extradition of the BBC news director" as he is sure that he came across the Azzam.com website via a BBC link.

Mr Maswood was scathing about the indictment of Ahmad, but "these days all you have to do is use some scary words and that does it", he said, to bring terrorism charges in the US. "What surprises me is how your government in the UK took this bait from them."

FORENSICS

No sale

HOME secretary Charles Clarke has dropped his predecessor David Blunkett's plans to privatise the forensic science service (FSS) after criticism from just about every quarter.

Police and scientists, among others, recognised the obvious commercial pressures that privatisation would place on the organisation and the police who rely on it. Expensive tests that might establish a suspect's innocence or nail a criminal might suddenly appear less attractive; and there would have been a clear incentive not to investigate fully crimes requiring more thorough forensic examination.

As the Police Federation said: "Policing could suffer if forces are made to choose which crimes they can, or cannot, afford to fund. This therefore raises questions as to the morality of a company making profit, albeit indirectly, out of criminality. Investigation should remain an exclusively public service."

None of these points were spotted by the "new" Labour captain of industry who led the review that concluded the FSS should be partially sold, Robert McFarland, former boss of BOC plc. Is he now crest-fallen? Not a bit of it. Home office minister Hazel Blears has put him in charge of reviewing the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO), which provides Knacker with IT and communications equipment.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

DIAMOND merchant and leading Arsenal shareholder Daniel Fiszman seems to have gone non-resident. Multi-millionaire Fiszman has swapped Hampstead for an address in St Prex, 20 minutes from Geneva. Fiszman resigned his Star diamond group directorships on April 5 last year – the last day of the 2004 tax year.

Sixty last month, this looks like a bit of tax planning by the astute Fiszman. Swiss cantons are renowned for their willingness to negotiate favourable tax deals with those who take up residence. Any sale of Star could now presumably be made UK tax free.

Arsenal fans might wonder whether Fiszman, who remains a director, has any similar thoughts about his 26 percent stake, despite the fact that in recent years he has taken an ever more prominent role at the club after leaving matters to his ally, vice-chairman and third largest shareholder, David Dein.

Such thoughts may be particularly pertinent given that ITV will next month have to shell out £30m to double its stake to an unwanted 10 percent and is keen to find a buyer. Perhaps these developments will encourage the long-rumoured Russian interest in the Gunners.

"The Working Time Directive says you have to take tomorrow off"

Meanwhile on Merseyside, Everton directors and supporters may well give up on the promised minimum £12.8m investment with up to £30m possible promised by Geneva company manager Christopher Samuelson if it does not arrive this week. Samuelson has been promising the money since August and saying the cheque was in the post from Brunei – home to his Fortress Sports Fund – almost every week since before Christmas. Embarrassed Everton directors have indicated that 31 January could be the drop dead date.

Samuelson – whose colourful business dealings have been detailed here since he surfaced at Everton – claims to be representing private investors. Some of the names he volunteered are known to be private clients of his Geneva-based Mutual Trust Management, formerly Valmet. Others would appear to be clients of Houston lawyers Steelhammer & Miller rather than personal investments by partners Robert Steelhammer and Michele Miller. Samuelson has been spending considerable time in Houston.

Samuelson now says he will not identify his investors. One wonders whether he has done so to the Brunei authorities. If the money does appear, perhaps the Fundamentally Supine Authority, as well as the Football Association, should ensure the investors are identified to prevent a repeat of what happened at Chelsea and what may be about to repeat itself at Leeds United.

The "cheque is in the post" saga at Premiership Everton mirrors that late last year at Leeds with Sebastian Sainsbury's laughable offer to take over the financially and relegation-challenged championship/first division club. As expected Sainsbury did not come through with the money, although he did produce all sorts of documents from HSBC suggesting millions beyond the dreams of avarice were available in Hong Kong. They just never somehow materialised.

Who has materialised instead is the far from comic Ken Bates, who has acquired control of Leeds through something called the Forward Sport Fund which is said to be based in Geneva although no trace of any company of that name can be found at the local company registry. Just who are the investors in the fund – which has eerie echoes of Everton – remains to be seen. Bates is not saying on the basis that Leeds is now a private company.

Maybe so; but wind back to 2003 and beyond and the long-running mystery over just who owned Chelsea – chairman K. Bates – behind the several offshore companies and bank nominees which then all acted as one to accept the offer from Roman Abramovich. The FSA is in theory still trying to unravel that puzzle to see whether there was an undeclared concert party controlling Chelsea Village, then a listed company and owner of the premiership club, and if the identity of all the true owners had been disclosed. Almost two years on and the FSA has still not pronounced on what if any result emerged from its investigations.

Given the ever tighter money-laundering regulations which the FSA is supposed to help police, perhaps in addition to inquiring about the Everton investors (should their money appear), it should also ask Bates just who is putting £10m into Leeds in return for a 50 percent stake and boardroom control.

THE collapse last month of half the case against three directors of Durex condom maker SSL International has renewed pressure on the Serious Farce Office and raised fresh questions about its recent track record. Such questions about its ability to obtain convictions compound equally serious queries raised about the increasing time being taken to bring charges in the first place.

Decisions have been awaited for now approaching four years on the collapsed Independent Insurance; almost three years on the National Health Service £400m over-charging/fraud investigation; over two years on the £33m missing from Izodia; and almost two years for the manifest £200m Ponzi fraud that was Imperial Consolidated.

Arrests have only been made in one of the three Is – five arrests in Imperial – where it is said that charges may even be imminent! Directors of the several generic drugs companies, subject of the NHS investigation, are due to be questioned under caution this month which could see possibly some at least formal arrests but possibly no immediate charges. Independent and Izodia? Who knows!

Even before the European convention on human rights was adopted the rule was that justice delayed was justice denied. When the SFO was established in 1988, the supposed deadline for charges was a year after an investigation began! Now under the convention delay can result in charges being thrown out.

With all four outstanding cases the argument is that there are many complex and/or overseas inquiries to be made which is responsible for the delay. But it is worth considering that it took the US authorities less than three years to invade Panama, seize its dictator General Manuel Noriega and convict him on drugs charges in Florida!

Even without such unusual extra-curricular methods unavailable to the SFO, Bernie Ebbers of WorldCom and Richard Scrushy of HealthSouth are already on trial now for giant scandals first exposed in 2002 and 2003. Five WorldCom and 15 HealthSouth defendants have also pleaded guilty. Charges have been brought against 30 individuals involved in the December 2001 collapse of Enron. All but one of the seven tried has been convicted. Thirteen have pleaded guilty with the trial of chairman Ken Lay and chief executive Jeffrey Skilling due later this year.

The last SFO annual report revealed that despite all the extra time now applied to the investigation stage, it had still managed to convict only 26 of 48 defendants during the year to April 2004, or 54 percent. By August its 2004-5 figure was embarrassing – seven out of 23 or a mere 30 percent! However, the results for 2004-5 have improved markedly since, despite the SSL setback, in part as a result of the publication of existing verdicts which were previously un-reportable due to other trials.

During the calendar year 2004 the SFO convicted 38 of 65 defendants tried over the 12 months – a strike rate of 58 percent. So far, since April 2004, the numbers, including SSL, are 34 from 57 – a slightly better 60 percent. The running score since January 2004 to date is 38 out of 68 defendants convicted, or 56 percent. But these are hardly impressive figures.

SFO insiders are hopeful that, pending legal changes creating a law of fraud and allowing for plea bargaining (the latter part of the tactics available to the planned Serious & Organised Crime Agency, SOCA, Britain's new FBI clone) will improve their ability to prosecute white collar crime more successfully. The SFO is pressing to see the plea bargain provision for SOCA extended to include fraud. Plea bargains are a key weapon in the ability of US prosecutors to persuade defendants to roll over and testify against former colleagues in return for deals on sentencing, thereby rolling up cases towards the top men. The SFO suggest these changes could improve its conviction rate back toward the two-thirds level seen in its early years. But it still needs to address the unconscionable delays.

THE dismal stock market performance and misplaced optimism exuded by Richard Branson over his Australian venture Virgin Blue is all too familiar to followers of the grinning pullover's business career.

The cut-price airline was launched in December 2003 at A$2.25 a share. Branson boasted that the flotation had raised twice as much

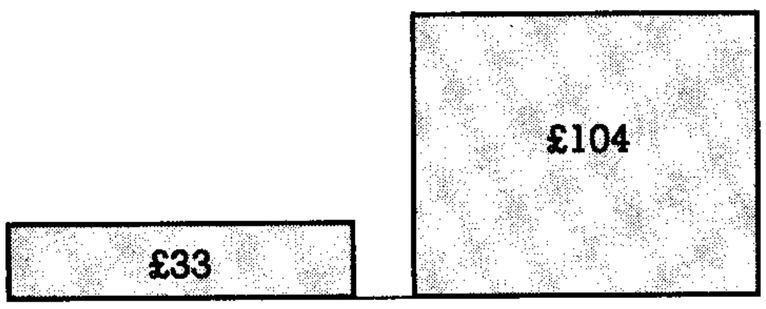
THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Tech trouble at John Duffield's New Star Asset Management

Value of £100 invested five years ago in...



...New Star's Technology Fund

...that fund's five (current) biggest shareholdings

capital as was needed to withstand a price war with the major Australian airline Qantas which Beardie confidently also predicted would not happen as it was "a battle they can't win".

Little more than a year and two profit warnings later (caused by that price war with Qantas' budget airline, Jetstar, that was not going to happen) Virgin Blue shares were down to A$1.60 before Branson's partner, the Patrick Group which owns 46 percent, last week launched a bid at A$1.90 valuing the airline at A$2bn(£830m).

Branson has rejected the bid and spent A$10m (£4m) – the amount Virgin initially invested to start the airline in 2000 – in boosting its stake to just over 25 percent. But the shares are still below the issue price. Shades of Virgin Express, Branson's Brussels-based cut price airline which was floated at $15 and is now $1.

SHAREHOLDERS in heating engineers Dunham-Bush (Europe) are understandably disturbed by the plans of the group's Malaysian majority shareholder to de-list the now penny shares from next week, thereby locking them in.

This surprise decision on costs grounds was announced last month and followed the unusual events at the annual meeting last October at which two non-executive directors were voted off the board by the Malaysians and their supporters.

Now the only remaining non-executive, Alec Drummon, from the company's brokers Keith, Bayley, Rogers, has sold all his shares before the quote goes. Drummon has written to shareholders saying he and the removed directors would have opposed de-listing and insisted on a bid for the minority. Presumably why the two directors were ousted, leaving chairman Freddie Pang and chief executive Derek Smith as the majority.

Chairman Pang has talked about the company being re-listed on AIM "when it is considered appropriate". Hardly reassuring for a company that boasts that it produces "products that perform by people who care"! Especially as the company went from loss to profit last year and has just reported half year profits up by 41 percent to £382,000. Prospective earnings could equal the current 1p share price.

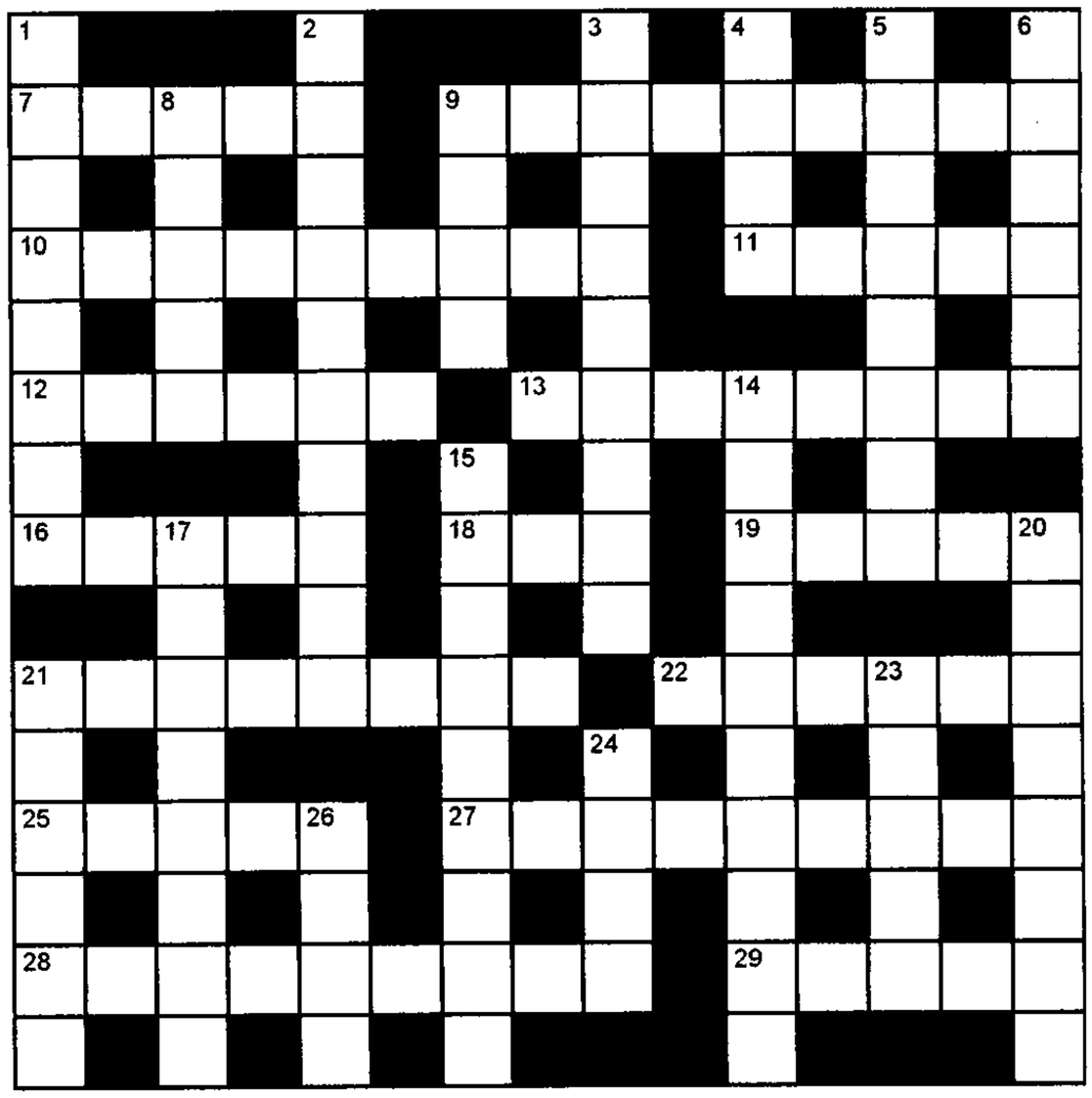
Time perhaps for the FSA and the stock exchange to intervene to protect the rights of the minority shareholders to avoid them being locked in or effectively forced to sell without the Malaysians having to face the cost of a buy-out at a fair price.

'Slicker'

● THE anonymous donor who provides a copy of *Private Eye* for the Baltic Exchange is worried that the new chief executive, Jeremy Penn, might think it is a freebie from the *Eye*. It isn't. It was originally bought to shame the directors who cancelled their subscription (on the grounds of cost) and provide members with some useful information.

EYE CROSSWORD 280

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 11 February 2005.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

7 Our old leader ("England's heart") is tripe (5)

9 Fanny Blue's arse-kicking (9)

10/18/20 L. Kelly of "the feet", bosom heaving – hardly viewed as an A-list celeb (4,5,3,3,5)

11 'Lush arse' little Kylie's inexpressibly excruciating no.1s (5)

12 Rowing with one in the middle of organ stimulation (6)

13 The caner first needs to get this project (5,3)

16 *Eye* reader joins National Guard, being sproggish (5)

18 See 10ac.

19 Blinking fast sex – relax! (5)

21 Is a broadcaster having a drug experience here in jungle clearing? (8)

22 Mind-shattering, PCs – yeh! (6)

25 Ear nibbler gets stony reaction (5)

27 "Lulu Orgy" (*Hello!*) – it's full of junk (5,4)

28 It's appreciated by the better hare with nothing left during bonk (3,2,4)

29 Girl that is stripped off in southern Africa (5)

DOWN

1 Fag's boxers possibly stiff (8)

2 Unreliable Archer's release about "yard near end of prison" (3-2-5)

3 Shag? Do this, chaps, and there's no chance! (4,2,3)

4 Lady's fingers helping to make Cook randy (4)

5 Reading fan's work out in middle of bang (8)

6 Pisspoor *Sun* scoff: "Out an MP!" (6)

8 Low-life Murdoch showing a bit of leg (5)

9 Bloody thick, this Conservative group (4)

14 "Going down" for Brenda is shaking with urgency, tense inside (10)

15 Taking the piss out of Joy after screwing (6,3)

17 Getting an erection is a revolting thing! (8)

20 See 10 ac.

21 Bloody channel being pretentiously creative about Brenda (6)

23 Influence, power shown by Conservative/ Liberal leaders? Not the fashion! (5)

24 Robin's predecessor, this member? (4)

26 Forte put in cooler – dished up crap (4)

Crossword 279 winner: PETER DAVENPORT

ACROSS: 1 Rock bottom 7 Buck 9 St George 10 Noodle 11 Self 12 Cheapjack 14 Teetotal 15 Cubism 17 At last 19 Stuffing 21 Interview 23 Dots 25 Bribes 26 A N Wilson 27 Chic 28 Tight-arsed.

DOWN: 2 On the left 3 Keep fit 4 Oars 5 The whole shebang 6 Monday Club 7 Blow job 8 Colic 13 State Visit 16 Sunstroke 18 Acerbic 20 Fiddler 22 North 24 Twat.

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What?
It was Mr Gibbons from my Dad's bell ringing group
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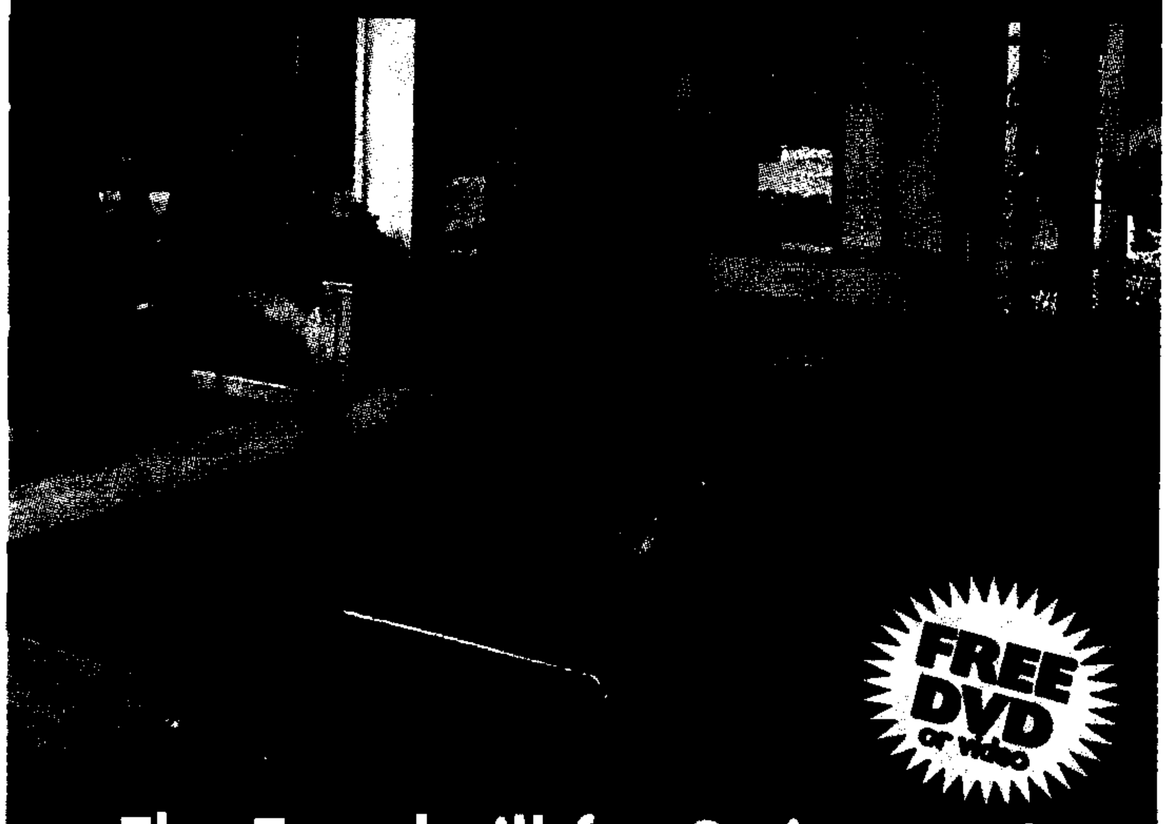

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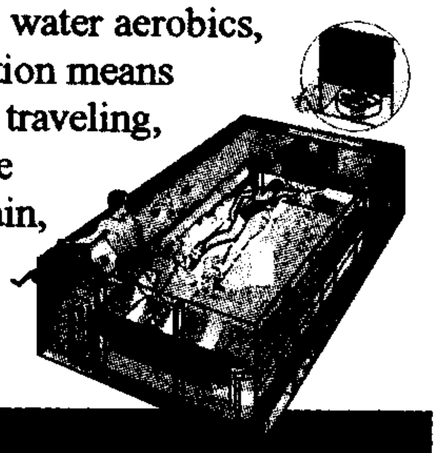

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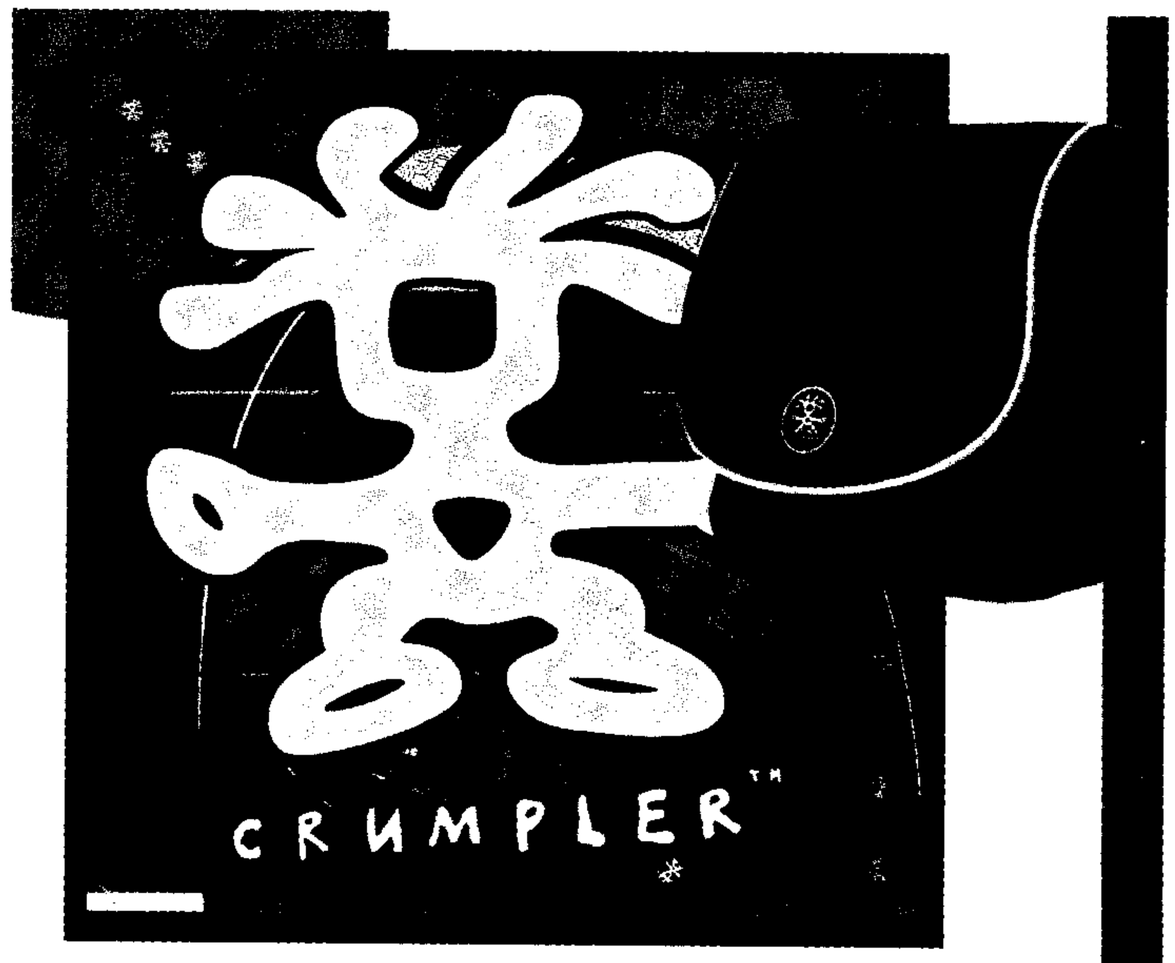

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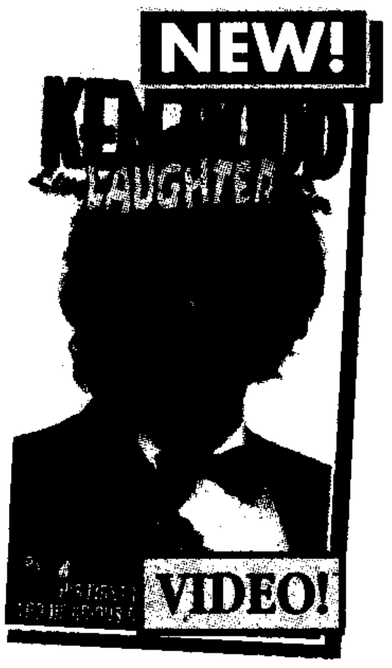

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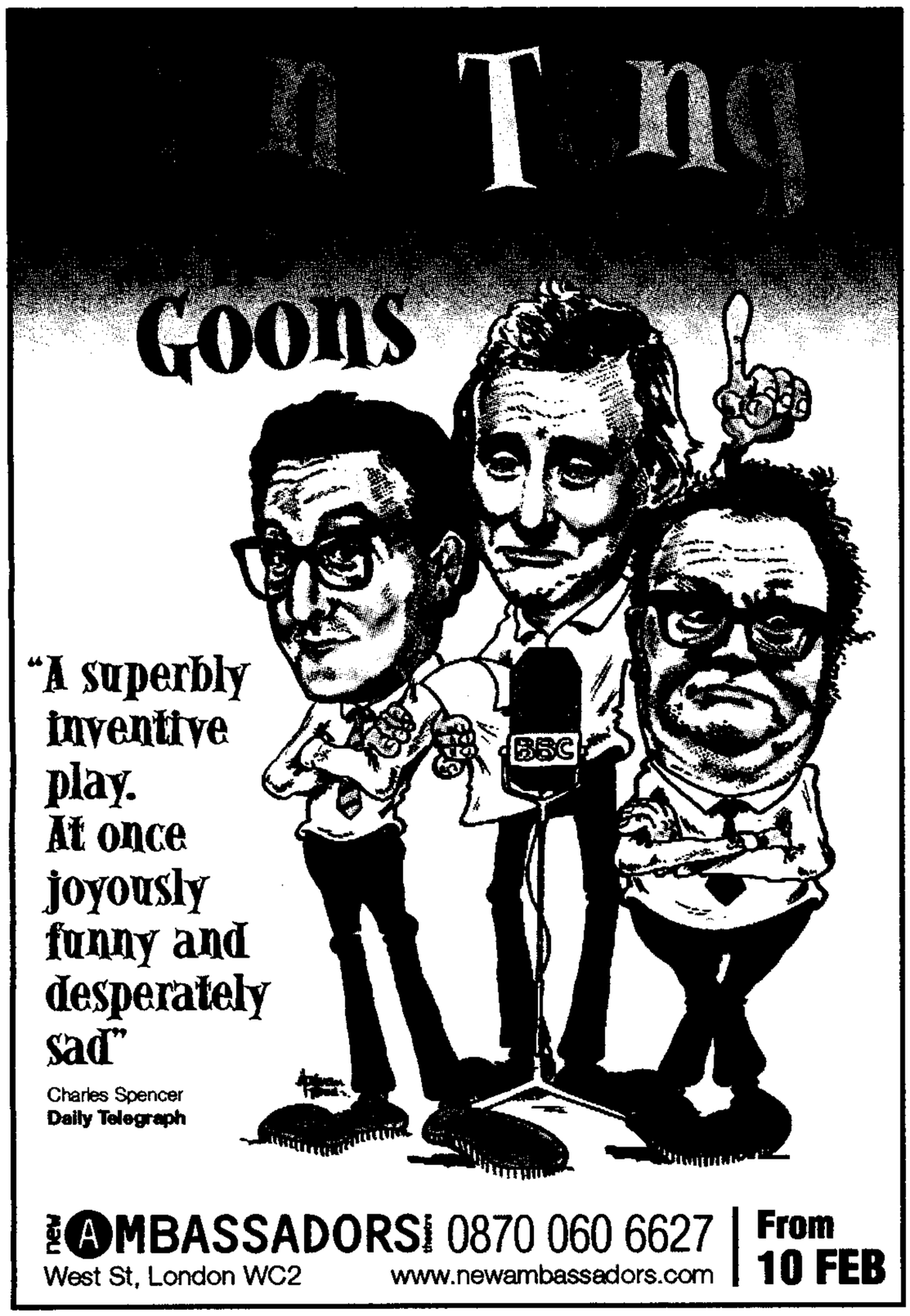

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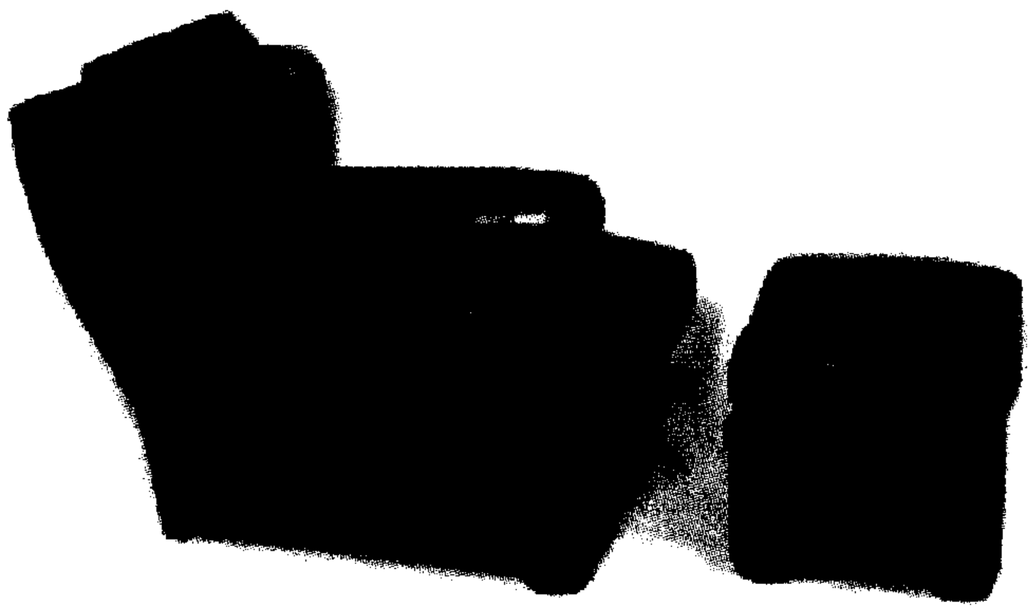

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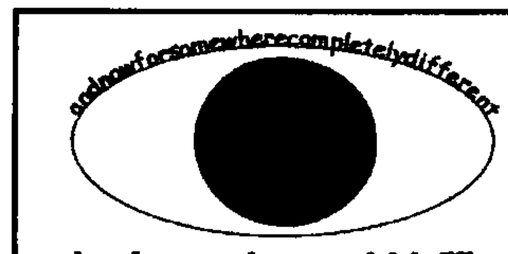

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EYE SAY

SPEECHWRITING by *Britain's leading* professional, Mitch Murray – see page 34

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STUDENT NEEDS £12,000 to write PhD on U.S. Presidency. Please help. HSBC, S/C: 40-34-21. A/C: 91401890.

PLEASE HELP damsel in distress. Young, 21-year-old mum made bad decision through love. Married boyfriend who escaped abroad with her money. Need £15K urgently. S/C: 40-35-26. A/C: 91565532.

VOLUNTEER (unpaid) environmental charity worker of 15 years' standing, now in massive debt. S/C: 30-98-77. A/C: 01858753.

CON MAN left me tens of thousands in debt - please help. RBOS, S/C: 83-24-22. A/C: 00212534.

GULF WAR VETERAN, PTSD, getting life back, large debts. Needs help for family. NatWest, S/C: 60-20-35. A/C: 85948756.

£30K WILL FREE ME from torture, please help me. S/C: 40-06-29. A/C: 81295993.

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LONELY, HEARTBROKEN and disillusioned with life, single mum pleading for help with huge debts. S/C: 40-19-15. A/C: 22671220. samsara@amserve.com

SERIOUSLY TALENTED artist needs serious money. S/C: 10-80-02. A/C: 58467302. Thank you.

ME SOBER, PARTNER NOT. Need £5,000 to get me and kids a mortgage. S/C: 87-70-10. A/C: 74335268.

HARD UP NURSE wants to give fiancee dream wedding. S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 83920896.

BLOODY REUNITED WEBSITE! Naive romantic fleeced by childhood sweetheart. Donations welcome to help recover lost savings. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 77-14-01. A/C: 26255160.

PATHWALKER GUINEA PIG out on a limb. 'Fighting breast cancer without chemo.' Urgently needs help. Monthly costs 800+ for alternative treatments. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-92-21. A/C: 00609712. Thank you.

VISUAL ARTIST, WOMAN, excellent achievements / track record, on brink of losing studio / living space, desperately needs K12, but extremely grateful any / all rescue donations. S/C 83-2002. A/C 00157406. Reply Box 120872.

PROUD MAN humbled by circumstance. Will accept any amount. Barclays. S/C: 20-07-84 A/C: 40016659.

VERY LOVELY, ATTRACTIVE lady, 35, seeking financial help. If genuine contact sally0@btinternet.com

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GRADUATE TEACHER, retired. I have two children and have a shared-care relationship with their father. I would like to meet a man for a permanent relationship. Reply Box 120779.

SLIM, ATTRACTIVE, 43 years old, brunette; financially independent and successful IT sales person who loves animals, buying things, politics and history; would like to hear from a good fun, bright (but not an intellectual snob!) sociable, financially stable guy. catherinelindley@hotmail.com

29-YEAR-OLD black female - professional, beautiful, cultured and glamorous seeks kind, happy, successful and urbane gentleman for relationship of substance. Photo please. ESSENCE@fsmail.net Reply Box 120855.

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EYE CONTACT

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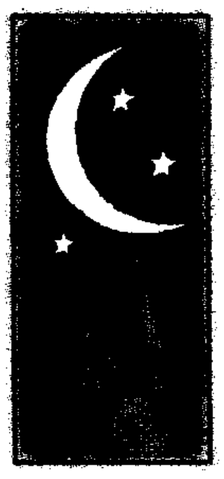

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POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS OF RAIL

- Rail is sustainable.
- Rail is far safer than road.
- London's rail commuters could get there no other way.
- Rail is environmentally kind - using far less fuel than road transport.
- Rail beats road for speed every time.
- Rail generates development.

BUT CONSIDER THE FACTS

Sustainable at a cost.

- Current subsidies to national rail are the equivalent to every household in the UK paying between £2,000 and £4,000 in taxes over the current decade. For most people a rail journey is a rarity, half of us use rail less than once a year.
- The London to Birmingham return rail fare has the range £20 - £44. Add to that subsidy which has the range 20 to 40 pence per passenger mile, and get £64 to £132 for the 220 mile round trip. Compare that with the fares by express coach which, if booked online and in advance, may be as low as £3.
- Every lane-mile of the motorway and trunk road system pays the Exchequer at least £320,000 pa.
- Every track-mile of Network Rail extracts at least £240,000 pa from the exchequer.
- Track maintenance for rail costs nine times as much as for buses and lorries.
- The annual cost of capital plus maintenance for a seat in a railway carriage is three times that for express coaches.
- During the miners strike, freight to power stations was found to be 20 - 25 % cheaper by road than by rail.

Rail Safety

- Deaths of rail passengers per passenger mile are double those suffered by express coach passengers.
- The network wide deaths per passenger mile by rail, including trespassers, but not suicides, are more than double those on the motorway network.

London's Rail Commuters

- Victoria Main line London receives 30,000 crushed passengers over four tracks in the peak hour or 7,500 passengers / hour / track.
- In contrast the single express coach bay that serves the New York bus station delivers 30,000 seats in the peak hour - more than four times as many as rail achieves per track at Victoria.

The Environment

- Express coaches and lorries could discharge the national rail function using 20-25% less fuel than required by rail.

Speed

- The average passenger's rail journey is only 25 miles. 90% are less than 80 miles. For nearly all of those the express coach would beat the train for speed - offering a more frequent service at a fraction of the rail fare.

Generating development or dereliction?

Far from attracting development, most rail stations are places of dreams often with endless acres of near derelict sidings. In contrast development goes where there is good road access.

WHAT DO WE CONCLUDE?

- There are overwhelming financial and environmental benefits to be had from converting underused railway lines into roads for coaches and goods vehicles.
- The cost of converting underutilised rail routes would be a fraction of the current costs of modernisation. This relatively small cost would also be partly offset by realising the development potential of derelict railway land that lays idle in the hearts of our towns and cities for the want of good road access.
- If London's rail commuters were to get one quarter of the current cost, without the crushed conditions they currently endure, then swapping the trains for express coaches at peak times, these coaches would fill only one quarter of the network space available, leaving space for commercial vehicles currently using unsuitable city streets.

COMMENT

- If the government wishes to subsidise some deserving would-be travellers why not give them the money and let them make their transport choice?

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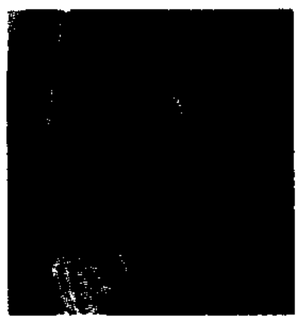

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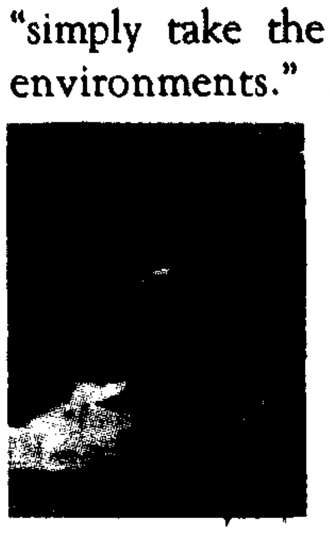
***Stuff* magazine gives these headphones five stars** and calls them "the kings of silence." *NWA World Traveler* reports they "simply take the work out of listening, especially in noisy environments." And *TravelPlus* says they're "incredibly comfortable, too, creating a sense of personal space." You can wear them without the audio cord to reduce noise. Or, attach the cord and connect them to a portable CD/DVD/MP3 player, home stereo, computer or in-flight entertainment system. When you're done, their convenient fold flat design allows for easy storage in the slim carrying case.



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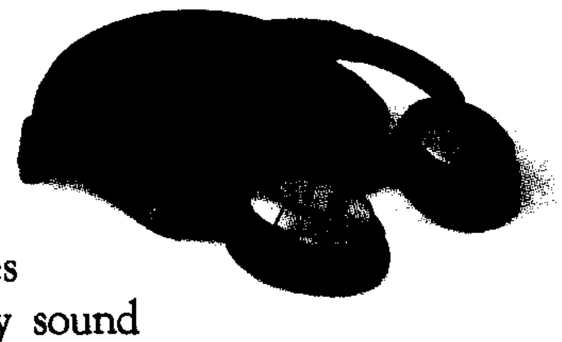

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